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ROYAL BANNER  
OR  
GOLD AND RUBIES



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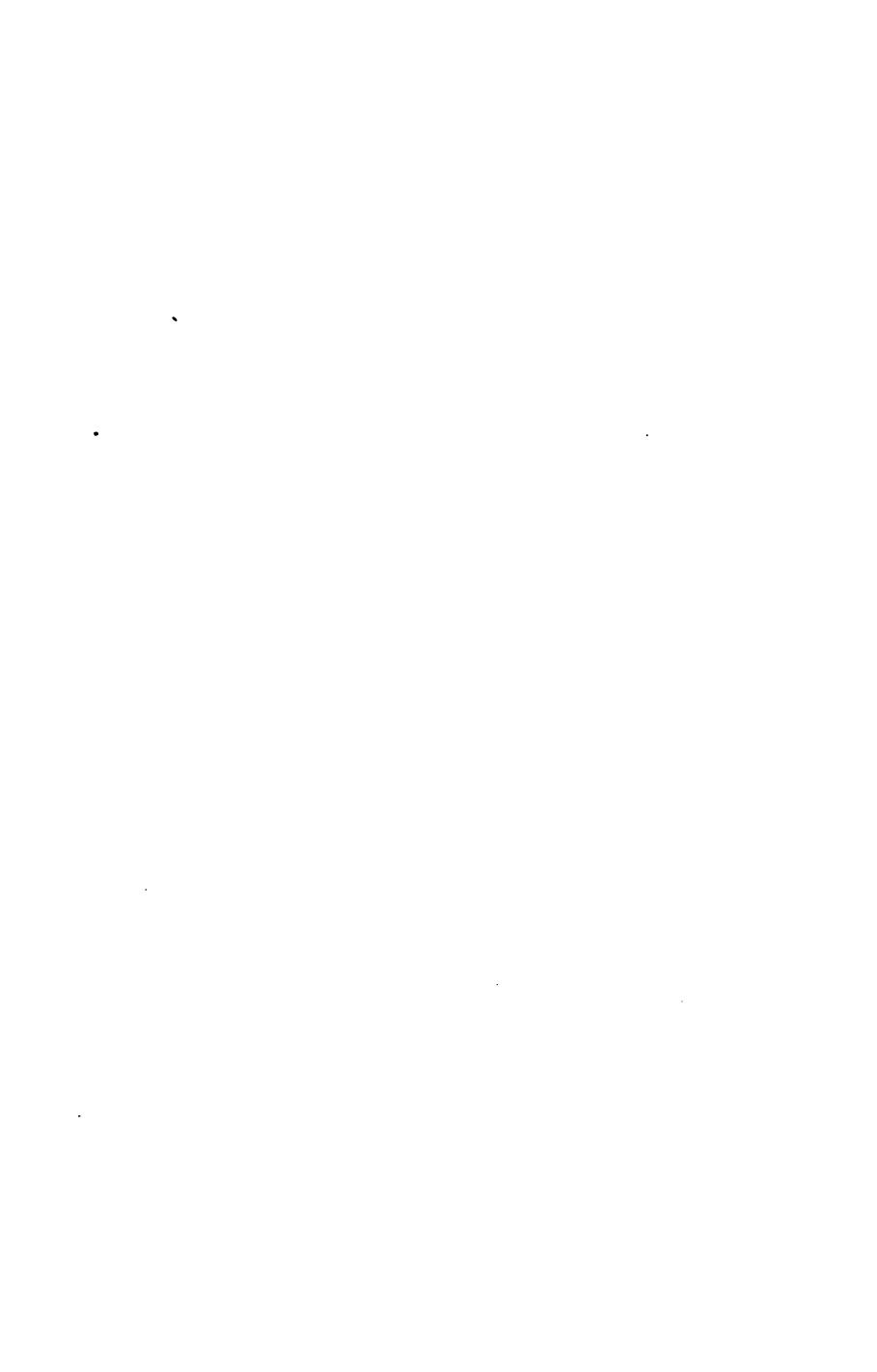




THE ROYAL BANNER.











THE WISHING-WELL

*" Amid the purple heather the well lay ; clear and cool, soft green moss grew close round it ; and ferns hung over its sides in graceful beauty."—Page 21.*

254. 9. 61.



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# THE ROYAL BANNER;

OR,

## GOLD AND RUBIES.

*A Story for the Young.*

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LITTLE SNOWDROP AND HER GOLDEN CASKET."

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Stand up! stand up for Jesus!  
Ye soldiers of the cross;  
Lift high His royal banner—  
It must not suffer loss!

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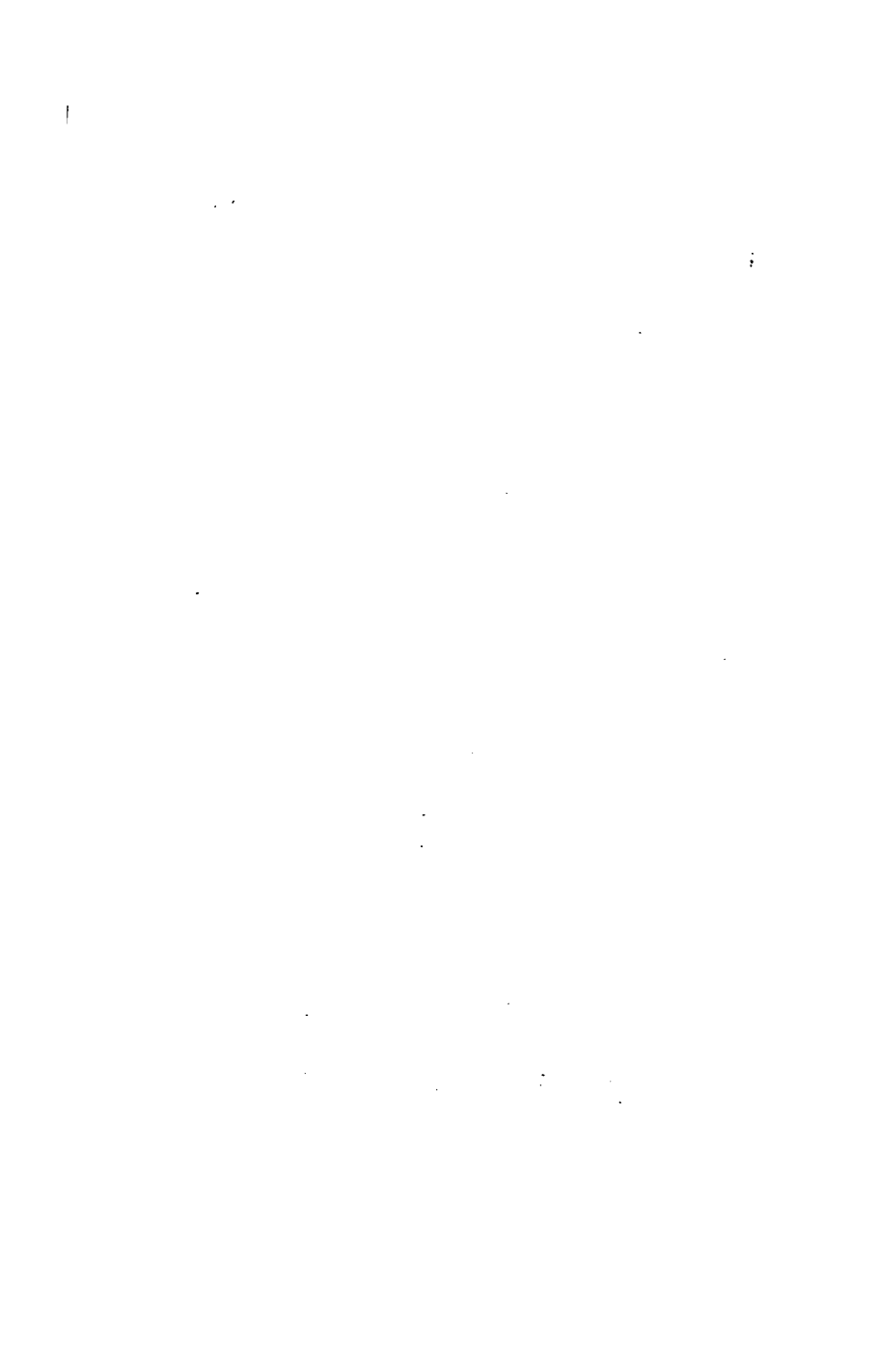


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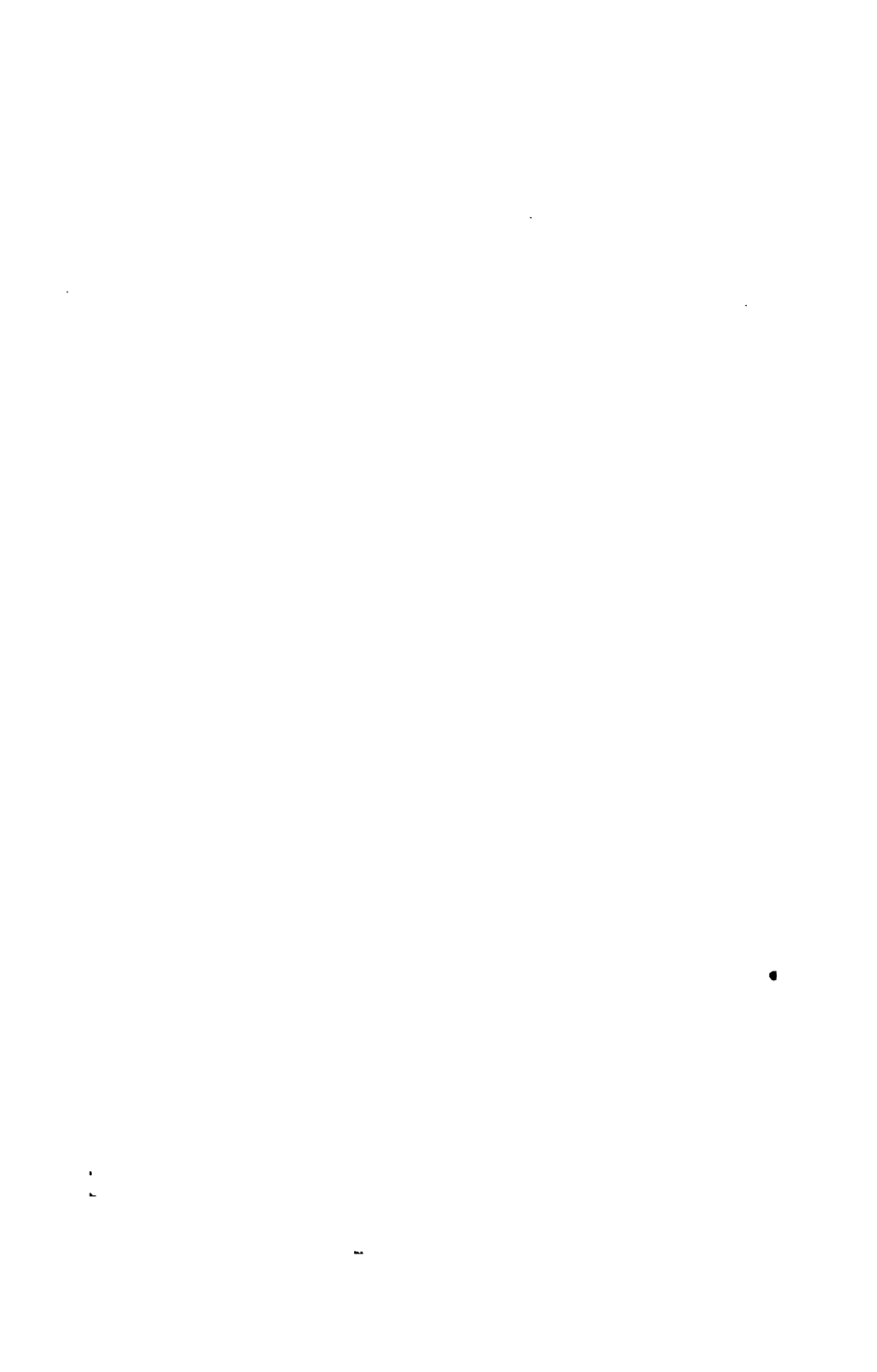


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# THE ROYAL BANNER.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE WISHING-WELL.

The well was deep, and the water,  
From some mysterious spring,  
Was ever gushing far below  
With a tender murmuring,  
And deep under ground a tiny rill  
Stole on in the dark to sing.

“OW lovely it is! only see, Aunt Charlotte!  
It is mine, you say? oh, I wish I were old  
enough to wear it! The rubies are beauti-  
ful; how they sparkle!”

The speaker herself was a pretty sight,  
—a blue-eyed, brown-haired little maiden of about  
twelve years old, dressed in a bright-coloured print  
frock, with a jacket to match, finished off at the  
neck and round the loose sleeves with a pretty  
crimped frill. She was standing at the moment we  
write of at a window in an old-fashioned country



THE WISHING-WELL

*" Amid the purple hesther the well lay; clear and cool, soft green moss grew close round it; and ferns hung over its side in graceful beauty."—Page 11.*

mansion in the Highlands of Scotland, carefully poising on her fingers a beautiful diadem, composed of gold and rubies, which latter glistened brightly as the rays of the autumn sun played on them.

The lady she addressed as aunt was engaged in writing, and hardly seemed to notice the child's words; but a bright-looking boy, perhaps a year older than his sister—for such she was—looked up admiringly at the costly ornament. “Well, it is a beauty, Nora, the gold 'specially. I wish I had it, I know,—the gold, I mean, not the diadem;” and he laughed as he added, “Fancy me wearing a diadem!—but it suits you to perfection.”

“Children,” said their aunt, who had put aside the letter she had been writing and come towards the couple, “take care what you are about. Put the diadem back into its casket carefully, and then give it to me to lock up in the old escritoire. So you both like it?”

Two voices answered in one breath, “Oh, so much, aunt!”

“Nora admires the rubies, but I like the gold,” said Eric. “But are not they both beautiful?”

The lady thus appealed to looked down for a moment, thoughtfully, at the rich casket in which Nora had enclosed her treasure. “Yes,” she said;

“but when your own dear mamma died, and left the diadem to me for her little daughter, she said she hoped both she and her boys would find out that there was something ‘better than gold and above rubies.’”

“Better than gold!” repeated Eric; “well, I think gold is pretty good; one can do such lots of things with it.”

But his words met with no response. Nora’s head was bent, and a tear had risen to her eye; for, though dimly, she still retained a remembrance of the mother who had loved her so fondly. “Above rubies!” and they were so beautiful; yet her mother hoped she would find out something more beautiful than they. “Can there be anything more so, aunt?” she said.

Her aunt smiled. “Yes, darling, much more so, much more valuable; and you can obtain it, my child.”

“I! O aunt—”

But just then the door opened, and a pleasant-faced gentleman entered. “Eric! Nora! indoors still on such a lovely day? Fie for shame! Put away work and playthings, and off into the glorious sunshine. Look yonder; the trees are glistening to-day as with many-coloured gems. And, mamma,”

he said, turning to the lady the children termed aunt, "as I passed the nursery door I heard two little voices asking, 'Where's mamma?' You had better go and see what's wanted. But where's Ronald?—not at his book, I hope, when to-day is a holiday? He studies too much, and you, Master Eric, too little."

"O uncle," said Nora, "Ronald is out-of-doors—I saw him go: but, for all that, he had a book under his arm; he can't live without books," she said with a smile; "and this is his last day here for a long time.—Let us go, Eric, and find out where he is,—at the Wishing-Well, I believe. Oh, it will be lovely there to-day!" and so saying she ran off, followed by her brother.

"What a sweet-looking girl Nora grows," said her uncle, addressing his wife; "she daily reminds me more and more of her dear mother when she was the same age, and I only some five years her senior. We two were always great companions, although there was a brother between us,—Charlie, you know, who died some years ago in Canada. Ah well! I am glad my own loving-hearted wife yielded to my desire to bring up dear Elenora's children when they were left orphans. The charge has not proved too much for you, Charlotte?"

“Oh no,” was the ready response; “the three orphans have brought joy, not sorrow, into our home, I think, Ralph; and our own little ones love them dearly. Nora is a sweet girl; but Ronald has the most character of them all. How I shall miss the noble boy when he leaves us! Eric can hardly fill his place to me yet: he is very heedless; he is the only one who causes me a moment’s anxiety. He has not the generous nature of the other two, I fear. Still, he is young, and I may prove wrong in my judgment of him. We need much wisdom, Ralph, from God, rightly to train these children and our own.”

“Indeed we do; but, you know, we have the command, ‘If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God.’”

Just then the door opened, and a messenger from the nursery called Mrs. Macleod away.

It was, indeed, a happy home in which the three orphan children of whom we are mostly to write had, shortly after their parents’ death, found a warm welcome. Benvourd House, the residence of their dead mother’s brother, had also been the home of her own young days; and very grateful did she feel when on her death-bed her favourite brother, with his young wife’s full consent, undertook to bring up the little homeless children, whose father had died in India only one year before.

Seven years had elapsed since then, and the children were growing up quickly in their quiet Highland home, in which three little cousins had been born since the death of Elenora Macintosh.

Ronald, the eldest of the three orphans, was now fifteen years old,—a clever, thoughtful lad, only prevented from being too much of a book-worm by his love of out-door sports, which had rendered him bold and manly; and amid the mountain breezes he had grown up a strong, hardy lad, with as gentle and loving a heart for the poor and weak ones of earth as his own mother had possessed.

Nora was right. At the time our story begins Ronald was seated beside the Wishing-Well, book in hand. But the boy was not reading just then; his heart was somewhat full. On the morrow he was to leave his quiet home to go to a large school in England; and from thence, at the age of seventeen, a cousin, who was the head of a mercantile house in London, had offered to give him a situation in it. He hardly liked the idea. He had a soldier's spirit, and would have chosen his father's profession (who met his early death bravely fighting in an Indian war). But Ronald had others to think of. He must work for his little sister, whom his mother had left to him as his special charge, and Eric as well.



He was thinking of these things as he sat beside the Wishing-Well, and he heaved a sigh as he laid down the spirited account of the early Crusades which he had been reading. "Ah, well!" he said, the days of the Crusades are gone. I can no longer join the noble band who sought to free the grave of our Lord from the hands of the Infidel, nor boldly bear the banner of the Cross and fight under it. I wish I could." Was the boy thinking of the old legend of the Wishing-Well? At all events, his amazement was great when a voice spoke:—

"Have, then, thy wish. In the name of the King of kings, I invite you to join in the noblest crusade that has ever been made—to rescue the thousands of prisoners held captive in vile bondage by the Prince of Darkness. Will you join?"

The lad rose quickly, a flush on his cheek. He had forgotten that he had spoken his thoughts aloud; and certainly imagined he was alone in this solitary spot, forgetting that an open pathway to the village below ran through the copsewood close behind the well. Turning, he faced the speaker—a young man of tall figure, and a countenance full of intelligence and fire.

"Who are you?" said the boy; "and what do you wish me to do?"

In a powerful yet musical voice the answer came: "I am an ambassador of the Most High God, seeking in his name to get recruits for his service to join the crusade I have spoken of, which is led by the Captain of Salvation, the Lord Jesus. Again, I say, will you, while the dew of your youth is upon you, join the band?"

"How can I?"

"First may I ask, have you taken the Lord as your Master, and given him your heart?"

The lad bent his head, then raised it calmly. "I *have*," he answered. "By my mother's death-bed, seven years ago, I gave myself to Jesus."

"The Lord be praised!" answered the stranger. "Then, when the Captain calls, you are *bound* to fight his battles, and display his banner fearlessly."

"But, sir, how can I? To-morrow I leave this for school."

"The very place to begin," was the earnest reply. "Help the weak ones there, like a true Knight of the Cross, and try to set some bond ones free. Carry the Lord's banner there, and see to it you are a true standard-bearer. Now, farewell! my time here is short. In the world's great field of battle we may meet again; if not, let our trysting-place be before the throne on high." Then, saying the words, "Inas-

much as ye do it to the least of these my brethren, ye do it unto me," he strode off through the heather as silently as he came.

For a moment or two Ronald gazed after him ; then sank down once more in the moss and ferns beside the Wishing-Well. When he again raised his head, the stranger was out of sight. Had it all been a dream ? No ; every word, every look, of the mysterious speaker was too deeply impressed on his mind and eyes for that. One thing was certain : he had promised anew to live to God and for God. He had joined the great army of the Lord of hosts ; and bending his head a moment in prayer, he asked strength from above to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

Just then a loud shout rang on the air. "Here he is, Eric ! I told you we'd find him here ;" and with a bound Nora stood beside the Wishing-Well. "Reading again, I declare, Ronald !" said the merry little maiden, catching up her brother's book and tossing it up in the air ; taking care, however, to catch it ere it reached the ground. "Do come, and let us have a race." But ere Ronald could answer, the child's mood had changed again. "No, wait a moment. I forgot, Ronald, this is your last day, and I want a long talk with you ; you know it will be an age ere

we have a nice one again." And with the gentle look stealing over her face which so often reminded her brother of their mother, she sat gently down and let Ronald twine his arm round her waist.

For a moment there was silence ; Nora was gazing thoughtfully down into the waters of the well. Then she spoke : " Ronald, what is it that is above rubies ? "

" Rubies ! " he said. " Little sister, what makes you think of them ? "

A shadow crossed her face. " Eric and I have been looking at mamma's diadem ; and oh, it is so beautiful ! I only wish I were old enough to wear it, the rubies sparkle so. But aunt says mamma's wish for me was that I might obtain that which is above rubies, and I thought I would ask you what that is. "

Ronald drew his sister very close to his side. " Yes, I know what it is, Nora. It is the wise king who says, " A virtuous woman is above rubies. "

" Virtuous ! " repeated Nora. " Oh, I know ! that means ' good. ' I'll try to be that, and begin at once. "

Ronald's reply to her remark was cut short by Eric, who had run off after his favourite dog Cherry, and now returned, dashing down his cap in his im-

petuous way; then, telling Cherry to lie down, he exclaimed, "Come, Aldy" (his great name for his brother), "as this is your last day here for ever so long, let us all wish for some special thing beside the well. Never mind whether the old legend is true or not. Who knows? let us try."

"I *have* wished already, Eric."

"And so have I," said Nora.

"Well, then," replied Eric, "tell out your wishes."

"Ah no, Eric!" said his brother; "wishes are sacred. I won't tell mine."

"Nor I," put in Nora.

Truth to tell, she had wished she might wear the lovely diadem when she grew up, and was not sure whether her brother would not laugh at her wish.

"What stuff!" said Eric. "What's the use of wishing, if no one knows. I'm not ashamed of mine one bit; so here goes: 'I do wish to get very rich, have lots of money, heaps of gold.' Wait a bit, and see if my wish is not fulfilled."

"Heaps of gold, Eric?"—and Ronald laid his hand kindly on his brother's shoulder. "Our mother used to say she hoped we would all find out what is better than gold."

Eric made no reply; the mention of his dead mother had touched his heart. Only Nora spoke.

“Ronald,” she said, “I’ve unwished my first wish, and wished another. Can I?”

Her brother smiled. “I don’t know whether it will stand good, pet, or not; I am not in the secret of the well.”

“But, at all events, Ronald, my last is my real one. I’m sure the first was just a sort of one; but I’ll keep to this one, and see if it comes true.”

She had wished that she might obtain what is “above rubies.”

## CHAPTER II

### THE OLD NURSE.

"Not yours, but His by right;  
His peculiar treasure now—  
Fair and precious in his sight,  
Purchased jewel for this brow.  
He will keep what thus he sought,  
Safely guard the dearly bought;  
Cherish that which he did choose;  
Always love, and never lose."



N leaving the well, the children stood for a minute or two looking around them, Ronald especially taking in every feature of the lovely scene before him; and although the other two hardly then realized it would be so, yet in after-years, in far different scenes, the memory of that day, and even many minute details of the landscape around the Wishing-Well, rose distinctly before their minds.

Amid the purple heather the well lay; clear and cool, soft green moss grew close round it; and ferns hung over its sides in graceful beauty,—some tiny ones were still green there, whilst all around had

caught the autumn colours. From the well northwards the eye ranged over grand mountains—some clad with trees far up their sides, others purple and brown with heather; whilst in the immediate background the copsewood was glowing in crimson and golden glory, the leaves gently falling with every light gust of wind, and strewing the ground as with gold and rubies.

Eric soon wearied, and ran off to amuse himself with his pet rabbits; but Nora and Ronald chatted on a while, till the nurse and two little cousins came in search of Miss Nora, who was wanted indoors to see a lady who was calling. Then Ronald set off alone to pay a farewell visit far down the glen to an invalid widow who had been his mother's nurse.

After a short walk he reached one of the most beautiful of Highland passes, on the opposite side of which the cottage for which he was bent was situated. Lovely indeed did the pass look that autumn day. Through it dashed a noisy little river, white here and there with foam gathered as it rolled over the high boulder-stones that were deeply embedded in its channel, and which at times almost obstructed its way; while its banks on both sides were richly wooded,—and as the boy's eyes rested on them, they literally blazed in scarlet and golden



splendour. No wonder that his heart beat with enthusiasm as he gazed at the scene; and he began, with boyish fervour, to repeat the lines,—

“Breathes there the man with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself hath said,  
This is my own, my native land?”

And we marvel not that his heart shrank from the thought of leaving it all for other scenes.

He received a warm greeting, chiefly in the Gaelic language, as he entered the hut where old Peggy sat in her arm-chair. “Come in, my young master, an’ bide a wee, an’ gleden the auld woman’s een wi’ a sicht o’ her bairn,”—for such she always termed the handsome lad.

He seated himself beside her as in olden days; but her keen eyes noticed the tear that now and then moistened for a second the eyes of her favourite, and told of a full heart. Quickly she guessed the cause.

“An’ so ye’re leavin’ us, Maister Ronald, an’ gaun yer first voyage intil the wide world? Aweel, aweel! it’s little auld Peggy kens aboot that world, she that’s been quietly fostered a’ her days, as maiden, wife, an’ widow, in the Highland glen. But, O laddie!” and she laid her hand kindly on his shoulder, “the Lord God, the Maker o’ a’ the world, kens ilka turn in it; he’s no ane to leave the lad he’s brocht to trust in

him to lose his road in a strange land. Ye're no gaun without a guid Guide, bairn; and Ane wha never leaves his wark unfinished. 'This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.' Ay," she added, "an' thro' the valley also; an' he'll no gie up the wark even on the ither side; he's guidin' your dear mother yonder, Maister Ronald, by the crystal sea an' the livin' fountains o' water. Ye're no feard he'll fail you, my lad?"

"No, nursie," was the quick reply; "I've no fear of God failin' to keep his word; but oh, I fear for *myself*. You'll pray I may never be 'ashamed to own my Lord,' nor ever hide his banner. I've enlisted into his army, nursie, and by his grace, and with his help, have promised to be a faithful soldier and a true knight, to help the weak, and, if possible, set free the oppressed."

The boy's eyes shone as he spoke; the old woman looked at him with emotion.

"The Lord be praised for his work begun in your heart, my bairn; an' may he keep you faithful thro' all temptations, an' at last gie you the golden crown to cast at your Saviour's feet. Your mother left her orphan children to the Lord's care, an' he's no ane to prove faithless to such a charge, even tho' for a while they stray in their blind ignorance afar from

him." She was silent for a minute, then said, "You'll mind Johnnie, my Johnnie, Maister Ronald; my dead daughter's only bairn? Aweel, his mother gi'ed him too into the Lord's hands, and yet"—and here a tear fell on the old cheek—"he wearied o' his quiet hame amid our grand old hills, and left his grannie in her auld age, and wandered off wi' an idle companion into the wide world, and it's three years sin' I heard frae him; an' yet tho' my heart wearies sair to see him, I can trust him to the Lord and believe. He can and will draw him to himself yet, even tho' my een should be closed to earth afore then. Ay, the Lord is a promise-keeping God. The world is wide, Maister Ronald, I ken that; but should you ever fall in wi' Johnnie Robertson, ye'll mind him o' his auld Grannie Cameron, and the Highland glen where he spent his young days? He had a kind heart, the bit laddie that I loved like my ain son; and had he ta'en heed to the command o' the wise king, 'My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not,' he'd been here still earnin' his livin', as his faither did afore him, as an honest tiller o' the ground."

Ronald felt for the old widow. Well did he remember the handsome lad, some four years his senior, who had been induced about three years before by an idle cousin to leave his home and try his

fortune in London. Only once had he written to the grandmother he had seemed really to love, and since then no word had come from him, and none knew whether he was living or dead; but from the lowly hut in the lovely Highland pass the widow's prayers of faith and trust ever rose for the orphan boy she had reared so fondly.

Ere parting Ronald knelt down and asked the old woman's blessing. She gave it to him in the name of the Father of the fatherless, and once more charged him not to forget his old friend Johnnie.

The lad promised, though he smiled to himself as he thought of the small chance he had of meeting the youth, although his school was in the suburbs of the great metropolis.

Back again through the pass he walked, with his firm, elastic step, drawing in with delight every breath of the free mountain air. Before re-entering the house, he turned aside by a path which led down to the old churchyard, and stood for a moment by his mother's grave. The sunbeams were shining there, glistening on the autumn flowers, which the loving hands of her children had planted. The boy plucked one to be taken to his new home, and as he did so a prayer rose to his lips that the remembrance of his mother, and her loving words and firm trust in God,

might never pass from his mind, but nerve him for the battle of life which lay before him. At the door of the house he was met by his brother and sister and his two little cousins, Minnie and Charlie, and the rest of the afternoon was spent in boyish frolics with them.

On the morrow came the parting. Nora's tears fell fast as the dog-cart bore her brother, accompanied by Mr. Macleod, out of sight. But in her ears rang Ronald's parting words, "Good-bye, Nora; don't forget brother Ronald; and remember our mother's wish concerning you and the rubies." She had answered through her tears, "Yes, brother, I will; I have begun already. I am going to be the kind of woman that is above rubies."

Poor Nora! she meant what she said, but as yet she had not even guessed the true meaning of the words, and all her efforts were made in her own strength, the utter weakness of which she had yet to learn in the school of experience.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE DIADEM OF LEAVES.

To the crags all bright, in the golden light,  
With floral diadems!  
As fresh and fair, as rich and rare,  
As any royal gems.



**P**ATIENCE is a virtue, and perseverance is a virtue, and so is punctuality, and uncle says I possess none of these qualities, and yet I want to be a virtuous woman; so I must try hard to become patient, persevering, and punctual." So soliloquized little Nora Macintosh the morning after Ronald's departure for school. Just as she had formed these brave resolutions the prayer-bell rang, and knowing that her habit of coming into the library five minutes late, and so disturbing every one, was one of the causes of her uncle's complaint of her unpunctuality, she at once opened her bed-room door, and for a wonder contrived to join the family group ere they were seated. She was so pleased with this good beginning

of carrying out her resolutions that it was some time ere she remembered, with a feeling of dismay, that she had forgotten her quiet morning prayer in her own room. When she remembered it, she ran upstairs and knelt down, then repeated a form of words without thought, to which we dare not give the name of prayer. It was a bad beginning. Still Nora was now quite content, and confident that she would soon be all her mother had desired.

"Aunt," she said after breakfast was over, "it is such a fine day, mayn't I walk across the moor half-way and meet Miss Stewart? and then we'll come home together."

"Certainly, dear, if you are sure that is the way Miss Stewart will come; only, remember you don't keep her waiting, as you did one day last week."

"Oh no, aunt, I shan't do that; I am never going to keep her waiting again, you'll see;" and so saying she bounded off. Down the lawn and through the copsewood she tripped, enjoying the crisp morning air, then out upon the moor, the heather of which was turning brown, though patches of purple still lingered here and there.

Miss Stewart, who came for some hours each day to instruct her, was the eldest daughter of a minister who lived at some distance from Benvourd, and in general her shortest way lay across the moor.

Nora, after running through the heather for a minute or two, and startling a covey of grouse, who rose with a whirl as she approached, stood still, and, shading her eyes with her hand, looked in the direction Miss Stewart should have come; but there was no appearance of her. She lingered a short time, then turned homewards, wondering if her governess could have taken another road. She seldom did, still once or twice she had done so. Musing thus, she re-entered the copsewood, and stood admiring the gorgeous colours of the low trees. Suddenly a thought struck her—it would be such fun to gather a lot of the bright gold and scarlet leaves, and form them into a diadem at home with ribbon-wire, some of which she had in her work-basket. She knew she could do it, and then she would have a diadem to wear which would look just like gold and rubies. Wouldn't Eric like to see it! Absorbed in the idea, she set to work, and forgot all about Miss Stewart, and the virtue of punctuality. Alas! poor Nora, she was suddenly brought to herself by her uncle's voice,—

“Nora, what are you about? Miss Stewart has been waiting for you for half an hour; you really must try to be more punctual,—you will get into a habit of being late for everything.”

She rose hastily, scattering, as she did so, all her



gathered hoard of bright-coloured leaves on the ground. She had not a word to say for herself, and was really grieved at having displeased her kind uncle. She entered the school-room cast down and out of sorts, and quite disposed to feel that it was no use to try to attain the virtue of punctuality.

It was certainly Miss Stewart who required the grace of patience that day, for her little pupil tried her sorely. Lessons repeated with inaccuracy, music played without the least attention, and work done so badly that it had to be taken out and done over again, made up the sum of the morning's occupations; not that the child meant to give trouble, but her thoughts were wandering, now to the beautiful diadem, now to the leaves, then again to Ronald, and from him to her wish at the well, and her morning's resolutions. She became impatient at returned lessons and picked-out work, and gave way to temper more than Miss Stewart ever recollected to have seen her do; and to sum up all, she had to spend the afternoon indoors in disgrace.

It was very humbling, and Nora shed many tears about it—just when she meant to be so very good. How had it all come about? Was there no little voice whispering to her? It was because she was trying to fight a very strong enemy in her own

strength. Had she altogether forgotten that it is only through Jesus we can overcome any sin? If so, she was not long in having a reminder, for after a while a gentle tap came to the school-room door, and her little four-year-old cousin, Minnie (her special pet and plaything) entered. Tears shone in the bright blue eyes.

“No cry, Cousin Nona; Minnie so sorry 'cause you cry. Why do 'ou? Has 'ou been naughty, Cousin Nona?”

The girl stooped to take the child on her lap, saying as she did so, “Yes, Minnie, I am afraid Nona is not good to-day. She can't be, somehow.”

The blue eyes were raised in amazement. “But, Nona, Jesus can make 'ou good. Mamma says so. Did 'ou ask him?”

Ere her cousin could answer, the child was called away; but her words lingered, and although Nora did not bend the knee, I think she *did* ask Jesus to help her; but, like the boy and the runaway knock, she never looked for nor expected an answer. Still her mother's desire and her talks with Ronald were not forgotten, though she made small progress in the heavenward path.

Mrs. Macleod watched her at this time anxiously, and half hoped that she had begun the pilgrimage

to the Celestial City, of which she loved so much to read in Bunyan's wonderful allegory; but again she would be disheartened, not at childish failures, but when for days at a time the girl would seem to give up all battling against her besetting sins, all seeking to walk in the right path.

In all womanly matters Nora received a good training in her Highland home. From her childhood her aunt showed her many household matters, and instructed her in them; and a very useful little maiden she proved in many ways. It was she who had the knitting and darning of Eric's stockings, the sewing on of buttons to his shirts. She also hemmed both his and her uncle's pocket-handkerchiefs, and was always eager to help her aunt in any work to which she could put her hand. Unknown to herself she was learning many of the accomplishments for which the wise king extols the virtuous woman: and in stretching out her hands to the needy, Nora had to make no effort; never did a more loving, tender heart beat in a human breast. No wonder she was loved in the cottages of the poor. It was a sight, to see the bright little child, as she tripped over the hills and through the heather with a flagon full of soup to carry to some poor bedridden old woman.

She was very happy then; and somehow, after Ronald's departure, she seemed to love those messages of mercy more than ever. A thousand welcomes, spoken in the Gaelic tongue, greeted her as she entered the cottages of the poor, and the very look of her large soft eyes cheered their lonely hearts. Her uncle declared she had a God-given gift of nursing: no hand could smooth a pillow so well as Nora's; no one could be more skilful in cooling a burning forehead, and shading the light from aching eyes, than she was; and no foot could tread more gently in a sick-room than hers did; and no voice sounded more sweet than hers as she read aloud a page to the suffering one from God's own Word. No wonder those who knew her best hoped she had become a "ministering child" from love to the One who came to earth not to be "ministered unto, but to minister." Only the sharp eyes of Widow Cameron read her aright. "Eh, but she's a winsome lassie," she would say to herself; "and wi' as kind a heart as her ain mither had, and weel inclined too. Maybe she's seekin' the right road, but I fear me she hasna got in at the Wicket Gate yet; and for as bonnily as she reads the Book o' Life, she hasna learned in truth to say o' our blessed Lord, '*My* God, and *my* Saviour.'" These remarks were made to

herself, one bright autumn day not long after Ronald's departure, when Nora had hastily entered the cottage to read a bit of Ronald's first letter to the old woman.

Her brown curls were tossed about with the wind, and her cheeks glowing with the exercise of her walk, when she tripped, brimful of life and spirits, into the cottage.

"Good news to-day, nursie!" she said, holding up the letter in her hand. "See, all this from your own laddie, as you call him, and a special bit for yourself, too. Auntie and uncle have a long joint-letter; but this is to me, his baby sister, he writes. Only fancy!" and the long curls were tossed indignantly back as she spoke. "Baby, indeed! and I'll be thirteen in February."

"Is't possible, missie? Dear me, to think o' that. It looks just the ither day sin' we heard o' your birth in the far-awa' land. But now, read to me about Maister Ronald, my bonnie lad. How fares he among strange folk?"

"Oh, very well! Here is what he says, after a bit just to myself, you know,—

"Tell old nursie I am quite happy here. Dr. Bowles and his wife are very kind (though he is strict too). We have a beautiful play-ground. She

can fancy, and you too. the noise fifty boys make there together. Wouldn't Eric enjoy our games? I know nurse will like to hear that I am trying to hold up the banner, and not be ashamed of doing so. Say to her she must pray for me, for I am only a weak school-boy, and do not like to be laughed at; but I know how even an earthly soldier has to endure hardness, and surely Christ's soldiers should not shrink from any reviling they may be called on to endure for his sake. I do hope I may never forget how he wore, for me, the crown of thorns, and how he says to his followers who are faithful to him, "I will give thee a crown of life."'

"That crown will be better than one of gold and rubies, Nora, will it not?"

The child's voice became silent, a light cloud crossing the fair face; but the old woman spoke,—  
"The good Lord keep the lad frae a' evil, an' gie him grace to steadily fight under, an' hold up the gospel banner; and one day grant he may wear the golden crown." Then suddenly she laid her hand kindly on the girl's head, and smoothed back the tangled hair, gently pushing back the straw hat. With a mother's tenderness she looked into the deep blue eyes, and noted the large fair forehead, but she spoke not.

Nora glanced up amazed. "What is it, nursie?" she said.

"I was wonderin', my lambie, what kind o' a crown is to sit on your bonnie brow. Is it to be the crown o' a vain world's folly, or the everlasting ane your mother prayed so earnestly might rest there? Ye canna hae baith, I'm thinkin'. Missie, which is it to be?"

Then Nora raised her head undaunted. "Oh, don't be frightened, nurse; I am going to be all mamma wished me to be. Indeed, indeed I am trying to be that which is 'above rubies.'"

The old woman smiled, but shook her head. "Ay ay, I'm glad to hear it, missie; but mind you begin at the right end—'God be merciful to me a *sinner*.' The virtuous woman Solomon alludes to, is the one who has the fear of the Lord in her heart, and whose trust is in him, not in her own power o' doin' right. And the same wise king says, my dear, 'The Lord giveth grace unto the lowly.' Have you sought strength and help frae the Lord Jesus about this matter, Miss Nora?"

The girl rose quickly. "Oh, yes," she said; "but I must be going now. The children were to meet me half way. Good-bye, nurse. Shall I send your love to Ronald when I write?"

“Ay, do, please; and tell him old Peggy’ll no forget to pray for her bairn. Fare-ye-weel.”

One friendly nod, and Nora was off, down the path through the pass, with as bounding a step as the mountain roe. But through the sound of the autumn wind she seemed to hear the words, “Have you sought strength and help from the Lord Jesus in this matter?” It was almost the same question her little cousin had put to her, expressed in her baby language; and, somehow, Nora felt she did not care to look the question in the face and give it a true answer; so to drown thought she began to sing, and just then little Minnie ran to meet her, and together they continued their walk



## CHAPTER IV.

### NEW FRIENDS.

Oh, world unknown! how charming is thy view,  
Thy pleasures many, and each pleasure new.  
Oh, world experienced! what of thee is told?  
How few thy pleasures, and these few how old!



"AN invitation, Nora," said her aunt, soon after the Christmas holidays had come to a close, "and for you."

"For me, aunt! Oh, who is it from? and may I accept it?"

Her aunt smiled. "One question at a time, dear. The invitation is from Mrs. Forbes, asking you and Eric to spend to-morrow at Craiglora, to meet Clara Ross and her brother from Edinburgh, who, it seems, have been spending the holidays with the Forbeses. I believe Clara is just about a year or so older than you, and Alick nearly as old as Ronald. You know, dear, they are related to you by your father's side."

"And may we go?" repeated the child.

Her aunt hesitated, but replied slowly,—

“Yes, I suppose so, dear; that is, if your uncle can conveniently send you to-morrow; you know Craiglora is nearly ten miles off.”

But Nora’s shout of delight drowned any more words.

“Oh, how delightful! a day at the Forbeses, and two new companions! Eric, Eric! do you hear?”

“Yes,” he said, bounding, as he spoke, to his aunt’s side; “it’s splendid. I only wonder what sort of a fellow Alick is. Come off, Nora; let’s run and tell Minnie.”

The children ran off; and Mrs. Macleod stood a few moments lost in thought. The children had mingled so little with companions, and now she felt she would have liked to know a little more about those strange cousins: for she felt that the becoming acquainted with them involved more than Nora knew; for already it had been mooted by the Rosses that, if the cousins liked each other, Nora should be asked to spend some months in Edinburgh with Clara.

“O uncle, how lovely everything looks to-day!” said Nora, as she, accompanied by Eric, sat in the dog-cart beside Mr. Macleod, on their way to Craiglora. And, indeed, it was a lovely scene which met

their eyes as they drove along; fields, woods, and mountains wearing a slight robe of pure white snow, which sparkled under the rays of the winter sun.

“Why, uncle,” said Eric, “a few more days of frost and we shall have skating; shall we not? Only fancy how Ronald will envy us when he hears of it.”

“The frost will need to be much stronger than this, Eric, ere the loch bears; so, remember, no venturing on the ice to-day on any account.—But see, Nora, yonder is Craiglora in the distance. I will just drive you to the door, then go on to Castle Bellmore, where I am to spend the day, and call for you on my way home. I hope you youngsters will have a pleasant visit.”

As they approached the door, Nora became both excited and shy; she had mixed so little with other girls, that pain was mingled with her pleasure. She expected to see her cousin a child like herself, only, perhaps, a little taller; so she, as well as her uncle, was much annoyed when Mrs. Forbes met them at the door, accompanied by a tall, over-dressed, languishing young lady, as Nora thought, whom she introduced to them as Clara Ross. Nora shrank back abashed. Was this the girl with whom she had come to play, as she had thought?

Mr. Macleod was the first to break the silence. "Why, Miss Clara, how you have grown since I saw you last! My little puss here will be altogether alarmed at your grown-up appearance."

Clara smiled. "Oh, we'll get on nicely, Mr. Macleod," she said in an affected way; "though I hardly thought that Cousin Nora would be such a little girl."

In the meantime, Eric and Alick had introduced themselves, and set off to visit the stables.

Clara Ross was dressed in the height of the then prevailing fashion, and the number of flounces on her dress struck Nora with surprise, and, for the moment, made her ashamed of her own neat though plain plaid frock. The girls soon became friends, Clara chatting away about Edinburgh and all its attractions.

"Do you go to many parties?" she questioned Nora.

The child smiled. "Parties, Clara? How could we? There are so few people live here, and the distance from one house to another is too great for any but grown-up people to go in the evening. Oh, no, we never go to what you call parties. But we don't miss them a bit. We have plenty of fun at home, and we play all sorts of games; and sometimes in

the evening aunt plays and sings to us; and in summer we have out-of-door games, and pic-nics, and drives. Oh, I assure you, we are never dull, never."

Clara shrugged her shoulders. "Ah well, you see, you know no other kind of life; but as for me, I would die if I lived here. Why, Laura and Jane, my elder sisters, say life here is not life at all, only vegetation. The poor people can have no ideas, nothing to take them out of themselves."

"Vegetation!" repeated Nora. "Why, Clara, I'm sure you don't know what you are talking about. If you visited in the cottages, you would see how clever and thoughtful the people are; fond of their country, I grant you, as who would not be?" said the girl with the enthusiasm of a young Highlander, "and fond of their Bibles, too. But they have plenty of interests that carry their thoughts to other places and other lands, as well as their own. I know aunt would tell you so. Why, there's hardly a family in the village near us but some of them are abroad, or, at all events, away in town,—some in Perth, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, London, and in America as well. Oh! life here is not vegetation, I assure you;" and Nora's shyness vanished as she stood up for her people and her country.

"Indeed, Nora, you are right," said Mrs. Forbes,

who, unknown to the girls, had entered and their conversation; "it is only foolish people talk that way.—Believe me, Clara, that life truly in such a place as this, is as full, as no great as that lived elsewhere. Nay, I quest those who speak of such lives as vegetation anything at all of what real life is, or value God's great gift. True, many of our people ha many books; but the few they have are wel and thoroughly understood. And though they nothing of life as spent in towns, that does not that their minds are narrow. The truly n minds, Clara, are those which have no res within themselves which can enable them to time profitably and pleasantly, without the co excitement of society.—But there, now, we mu waste all the day in talking; suppose you jo boys in their game of battledoor and shuttlec the library?"

Clara tossed her head a little at the pr muttering something about childish; but Nora's delight at the idea, she yielded, and so house resounded with the laughter of young in which Clara's was loudest. With none foolish companions to laugh at her, the gi good-natured and childlike; but long ere

parted, Nora got a vivid account of town pleasures, parties, and dress, which certainly gave her a great longing for a peep at them all; and when she told Clara about her beautiful diadem, her companion's interest was much excited.

"A diadem, Nora! how lovely! They are quite the fashion just now. You must come to visit us soon, and learn town ways and manners; and then in a few years, when you are come out, you will wear the diadem at parties. How I wish I had one! Do you know, when I look at you I see you have a head and brow just suited for a crown."

What had she said that brought a cloud across the girl's face?—a very momentary one, no doubt, for it soon passed. Yet long after, when Nora was outwardly engaged at a game with her cousins and Eric, she seemed to feel the touch of a hand on her head and brow, and to hear the old nurse's voice as she said: "I was wonderin', my lambie, what kind o' a crown is to sit on your bonnie brow. Is it to be the crown o' a vain world's folly, or the everlasting ane your mother prayed might rest there? Ye canna hae baith, I'm thinkin', missie." Why not? she was asking herself, when Eric spoke impatiently:—

"Nora, it is your turn now. What are you dream-

ing about? I declare you just looked like Ronald in a dreamy fit just now."

Nora started. "All right; I forgot it was my turn." And then the game went on.

The girls became great friends. Clara was much attracted by her bright young cousin, and determined to ask her parents, on her return home, to invite her to come and live with them for a while. There was much that was amiable and lovable in Clara's nature; but the crust which a worldly upbringing causes to grow over the heart and affections was beginning to grow on hers. An ardent nature, which in her early days sought eagerly for love, for love's own sweet sake, was now seeking rather for admiration, with its deadening influences. No one had spoken to her of that which is "better than gold, and above rubies."

The drive home in the evening light was a quiet one. Even Eric's spirits were subdued by the day's frolic, and Nora was more than usually thoughtful. Clara's words, unwilling as she was to allow it, had done their work: the visions of a town life, and plenty of companions and amusements, were strangely blended in her young mind with thoughts of sparkling rubies and an unfading crown.

At last she broke the silence by the question—



"Uncle, do you and aunt never mean to go to Edinburgh for the winter, even after Minnie and Charlie are old enough for school?"

Mr. Macintosh smiled. "'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof,' Nora," he said; "and an evil indeed it would seem to me, to be obliged to live even a few months of each year in any town. But as yet we need hardly think on the subject, so far as Minnie and Charlie are concerned; and no doubt, if it be found advisable for us to go when they are old enough, the way will be made plain, and duty must come before pleasure. Would you like to live in Edinburgh, Nora?"

The child flushed up. "No," and "yes, uncle. I would be sorry, of course, to leave Benvourd; but I do think it would be pleasant to live in a town for a while."

"That it would," chimed in Eric. "Alick says they have splendid fun in their house, and parties every week."

Their uncle gave a low whistle. "Ha, ha!" he said; "is this the effect of the day's pleasure?" Then he added more gravely—"Do you think, children, that your cousins have a happier home than you have?"

Nora's impulsive throw of her arms round his

neck at that speech was rather embarrassing, as he was the driver ; and her indignant declaration of " No, no ! they could not have a happier home than we have ! " all but started the horse with its vehemence : whilst Eric, too, said indignantly, " That wasn't what we meant ; only—" But what was to follow the " only " was not disclosed ; for at that moment they stopped at the door of their home, and both children ran off eagerly to rehearse to their aunt the story of the day.

That visit, as Mrs. Macleod had anticipated, resulted in an invitation for both children to spend the winter in Edinburgh with their cousins the Rosses, and have the advantage of schools there.

" I have been fearing this," said Mrs. Macleod, as she handed the letter to her husband. " How shall we answer it ? There are advantages, we must own ; and yet, without being uncharitable, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the Rosses bring up their children only for this world, and God is shut out from their house."

Mr. Macleod laid his hand gently on his wife's shoulder. " Mary," he said, " the Lord can find his own way into homes from which he is apparently shut out. We must not decide this matter hastily, nor without asking counsel of him. If we could

always keep those children guarded from evil, gladly would I do so ; but I question if already a spirit of discontent has not arisen in the hearts of both of them, as regards the quiet life we lead here. If we let them go, it may be God's way of showing them in what real happiness consists. Remember, as their father's nearest relations, the Rosses have a right to have them visit them for a while. But we must take time to consider such a proposal."

Three days after that morning the children were told of the invitation, and of the arrangement that their uncle and aunt had made regarding it. Eric was to go first, starting almost immediately, and remaining till the end of the school season. Then next year, when Nora was a little older, she should go, God willing, for some months also.

Few words were spoken by either of the children as this announcement was made ; though, boylike, Eric was delighted to go, and Nora for the while disappointed that her turn would be so long deferred. Still, we must own that her loving heart shrank from the thought of leaving those she loved so dearly. There were tears in her eyes on the morning that Eric set off from the home-nest, leaving her the only one of the orphans remaining there ; but she only threw herself into Mrs. Macleod's arms, and said


quietly—"Oh, I am so glad that I have you and uncle to love me still!"

Many anxious thoughts followed Eric as he left his home. There was no evidence that any thoughts of heavenly things were in his heart; and yet, though his friends failed to realize it, the seed sown was not in vain. The day-by-day power of a good example, the blessed influence of a Christian home, are never wholly without effect; though it was no hand in that happy home that was commissioned from on high to lead Eric to seek what is better than gold.

## CHAPTER V.

### AN ENGLISH HOME.

"I tremble when I think how much  
I love him; but I turn away  
From thinking of it, just to love him more,—  
Indeed, I fear too much."

NE, two, three, and over!" called a bright-faced little fellow of some eight years, as he jumped again and again over a low iron fence which separated the shrubbery at one part from the shady lawn of the old English castle of which he was the youthful heir. A pretty curly Skye-terrier puppy shared his sport, and jumped every time his young master did so. Those two were plainly having "a good time" (as the Americans say), judging by the sparkle in their eyes. They were alone, apparently; and the stately old trees, and even the gray, venerable castle itself, seemed to keep ward over the young creatures in their play. Not that they were the only young things about just then: for young leaves were quiver-

ing on the branches of the old trees, and young birds were chirping in the pretty little nests in the shrubs and hedges; young flowers were peeping up through the tender grass, and the very sweetest of violets and primroses were dotting the banks of the sparkling river that intersected the lawn; and, more than all, young, woolly, curly lambs were frolicking about, enjoying themselves as much as the merry boy, the owner of them all, and his frisky companion.

The old trees had looked down for many years on groups of merry children playing beneath them, children whose shouts echoed all around, but who had long since passed away, their work in life done, and a new generation had taken their place,—to pass away, too, in their appointed time. Yet still the old trees grew on.

But there was only one child playing there now. Brothers and sisters he had none. A fatherless child, too, but a merry one withal. The large brown eyes were almost always dancing with fun, save when they rested on the face of his widowed mother. Then there came a look of tenderness and a depth of love into them, which quieted the fun, it may be, but increased the happiness of the young spirit: for what were all the riches to which the boy was heir in comparison with the mother whom he adored?

Bold, reckless, and even disobedient to others, one word from her, one look of her soft gray eyes, brought him in his most rebellious humour a penitent to her knee.

In the midst of his play, in the noontide glory of that spring day, a voice called, "Sir James! Sir James! come in; a gentleman wishes to see you."

Unheeded fell the servant's voice.

"Come in, indeed!" said the child, addressing the dog beside him. "Go indoors in such a glorious day as this! Not likely, Snap, is it, for all the gentlemen in the world?" Then, as the call was repeated, and the butler walked up to his young master, the boy turned: "You can say I'm busy, Walter. If the gentleman wishes me, let him come here. It's a shame to be indoors in such a day!"

"It is her ladyship's desire you should come, sir; she said to tell you so," said the butler.

"Mamma wishes me? Oh, then, I must go! Here, Snap, come along! *she* won't wish to keep us long indoors."

On a sofa in the castle drawing-room lay a gentle-looking lady, dressed as a widow; a tall gentleman, not unlike herself, stood near her. They were engrossed in conversation; the subject a painful one

to the lady apparently, for her eyes were full of tears, and her voice trembled as she said,—

“So soon, Edward? must it really be? How can I bear it? And he is so good,—and well advanced too; might it not be deferred for another year?”

But the answer came in a firm, manly tone, yet gentle withal: “No, Charlotte, it cannot be put off. James is now eight years old: and though I grant he is obedient to you, still he is under no control to any one else; and, as his uncle and guardian, I must advise, nay, urge his being sent away from home, and allowed to mix with other boys. Think of the property and the riches to which he is heir; and remember, dear sister, what a responsibility will fall on him. With the control of so many and so much, he doubly needs to learn to control himself. I know what a trial it will be to both of you; but in the end it will be best. The school I have selected is a good one; the master kind, though strict; and his wife a ladylike, motherly person. Be brave, Charlotte, and let him go. You know”—and here he stooped over the sofa, and kissed his sister’s brow—“that the ‘Father of the fatherless’ will not forsake your child.”

She looked up—a true woman, with a mother’s unselfish heart shining out in her eyes through the



tears: "So be it, then, Edward; he shall go, and I will trust and pray."

Just then the door opened, and the beautiful boy bounded in. "Oh, Uncle Edward, are *you* the gentleman who wished to see me, and brought me away from such a game of fun with Snap?" Then, shaking hands with him, he ran to his mother, and stood beside her. "But, mother dear, it was because Walter said *you* wished me, that I have come. What is it, mother?" The question was asked in a troubled tone, for his quick eye had detected the tears that still glistened on the dark lashes. "What is wrong, mother darling?"—and, the boyish wildness all laid aside, he bent, with a gentle look, over her.

"Uncle Edward and I have been talking about you," was the reply, as she gently put back the brown curls off his large open forehead.

"Well, and what then? I've been doing no harm, mother—only jumping with Snap. I could not have sat still to-day. Why, out-of-doors everything seems dancing and jumping—the leaves on the trees, the little river over the stones, and the lambs, mother—oh, if you only saw them! they are just wild with fun. I do believe, if you had been out, you would have run yourself, mother. I could not have stayed

shut up in the school-room to-day for even one hour. I met Mr. Dale coming, and told him so, and that he need not go on, for I could not learn a lesson on such a day."

"James," said his uncle, in a stern tone, "are you the proper person to tell your tutor when you are to learn lessons and when not? It is high time such a state of affairs should come to an end." Then, in a kinder tone, he said, "Tell me, James, do you think you are put into this world only to please yourself?"

The brown eyes fell for an instant; but the saucy look shone in them again as he answered, "I suppose not, uncle; but I can't sit still when the sun shines like this, and everything calls me to come out and play."

At these words Lady Dudley looked anxiously at her brother. How could she tell this boy that ere long he must leave his happy country home, and spend, not one, but many hours of each day pent up in a school-room? But the expression in her brother's eyes left her no alternative. Drawing her son close to her, she said, "James, can you be a brave boy for mother's sake, and help her to be brave too?"

He started up—"Ay, mother, that I can; how can I help you?"

Calmly then she told him all. At first he hardly

took in all that her words implied. "Go to school, mother? Leave you, and Winder Castle, and Snap? Oh, mother, uncle, I could not! Don't send me away—oh, please don't! I'll do anything, Uncle Edward—anything I'm bid. I'll send and ask Mr. Dale to come back this very day; and I'll sit hard at lessons for hours, if only I need not go away."

"James"—it was his uncle who spoke—"I thought at least you would try to save your mother pain. Look there!" For Lady Dudley, who was in delicate health, turned deadly pale, and lay half fainting.

In a moment the boy was himself again, and, with a bottle of aromatic vinegar in his hand, bent over his mother—making her smell it, using all the while every endearing term he could think of; and when she was restored, he said bravely, "Mother, dear mother, don't look like that again, and I'll do whatever is best. I'll go, and show you, and uncle too, that I'm not selfish. I will be brave for your sake; see if I don't. Only, I may come back soon, mayn't I? And you'll not send me far off; say you'll not send me far!"

"No, my boy, my own darling boy, you will be only a few hours' distance by train. And you will come often home to see us all; mother could not live long without her boy. God bless and keep him!"

No more words passed on the subject that day in Sir James's presence; but more than one inmate of the castle noticed that the boy played no more, but sat silently under the shade of the old trees, or else at his mother's couch. Poor child! he could not remember his father's death, so this was his first sorrow. But true to his promise, he kept bravely up, and the tears which he shed were shed alone, where no eye but that of his Father in heaven saw them. Not for worlds would he increase the sorrow which he saw his mother was feeling at parting with him.

"By the way, Charlotte," her brother remarked, on the day of his return from leaving his nephew at the much-dreaded school, "Dr. Bowles mentioned to me that he would put James under the special care of one of the steadiest boys in his school—Ronald Macintosh, an orphan lad from Scotland. I wonder if he can be a son of the Elenora Macintosh whose husband fell in the Afghan War, and of whom our brother Willie used to speak as the sweetest Christian lady he ever met. I should not wonder if it is the same; for now I remember Dr. Bowles said his uncle had a property in the north called Ben-vourd, and I know Willie used to speak of Elenora's home by a name something like that."

Lady Dudley's face brightened for the first time since she had parted from her child. "Oh," she said, "if he be a son of Captain Macintosh, of the 14th Indian Cavalry, he will be well brought up, for both father and mother were Christians; though, to be sure, they have been dead some time. O Edward, will they be kind to my boy, my little son?—How will he bear it? and how shall I?"

These last words were to herself. And then she went with her heavy heart to the very best place she could go with it—even to the throne of grace; there to seek again help for her loved child, and strength for herself to bear up bravely for his sake. She did not fail to ask for this child so richly gifted with the world's wealth, that he might learn to use it aright, and to estimate it at its true value; and in the spirit if not the very words of Elenora Macintosh's dying prayer, she asked that her loved boy might have the true riches, even those heavenly ones which are "*better than gold.*" If any parent thinks that her grief at parting from her boy for so short a time is exaggerated, let such bear in mind all that he had been to her from his birth, and that he was her "only son," and she was "a widow."

## CHAPTER VI

### SCHOOL LIFE.

Unfurl the Christian standard !  
Lift it manfully on high !  
And rally where its shining folds  
Wave out against the sky !



SATURDAY afternoons were seasons of special delight at Knowlton School, as at many another ; for then the boys were free, under certain regulations, to do as they liked, and that almost entirely without the supervision of the tutors—Dr. Bowles holding the opinion that boys put on their honour, and really trusted, were less likely to break rules than those who were watched too closely : so no boy was called on to give an account of the manner in which the day was spent after one o'clock, if they were only inside the gates at a specified hour. One thing, however, was forbidden. Within a walking distance of Knowlton there ran a bright, sparkling river, shaded in many places by trees, which afforded a pleasant shelter in

summer days ; whilst the river itself in some parts was known to be well stocked with trout—a temptation of no small kind to the boys. In former years Dr. Bowles had obtained leave for some of his older scholars to fish in it occasionally ; but of late the permission to do so had been withdrawn, and so the doctor found he had to make a stringent law on the matter, and every boy knew that transgression of it would meet with summary and severe punishment. Some of the boys still grumbled about it ; but really they had not much reason to do so, for what with cricket and games of all sorts, pleasant strolls through the wood not very far distant, or visits to the metropolis itself every now and then with Dr. or Mrs. Bowles, they had plenty of pleasant ways of passing their Saturday afternoons.

It is on a bright June Saturday that we again take a peep at Ronald Macintosh. He is sitting with one of his old dreamy looks, half gazing out of the window, half looking at the clouds as they skim along. He is alone ; and though his lips are silent, we take the privilege of putting his thoughts into words :—

“ ‘Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed,’ ” he was saying in his heart. “ ‘ Displayed,’—but surely that does not

mean we must tell everything we do? Now, I do want to go and see that old sick woman I found out two or three weeks ago. She said my reading to her comforted her. But then the boys have begun to wonder where I go and what I do. Surely I am not ashamed to tell? Still, it is no business of theirs; and if I did, it would look as if I wanted to boast of doing it. It can't be wrong to be quiet about it. Of course, when they know, there are several will laugh and call me names; and I do *not* like that. Perhaps it is cowardice keeps me from telling,—I don't know. 'Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of *truth*.' But this has nothing to do with truth; and it is the Captain who has said, 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.'" Here came a pause, followed by the resolution: "No, I will not say a word about it unless Dr. Bowles asks me, which is not a likely thing. And I must try to go to-day, for when I missed a Saturday lately, poor old Susan said she was wearying for my coming all that day; and I'll be back in time enough for a game at cricket afterwards."

So saying, he rose, and began to prepare to go out. Ronald had a good name at the school, where he had now been for some months. He was a favourite



with the masters, who marked his diligence at lessons and love of books; and was liked also by most of the boys from his obliging disposition and his prowess at all sorts of outdoor sports. True, there were some amongst them who sneered at what they called his religious notions, fit only for priests or women; but even in that respect his frank, truthful, consistent character, silenced in time those who opposed him, and won from them the testimony that at least Macintosh's goodness did not make him stuck up or niggardly.

Very faithfully, notwithstanding, had Ronald held up the banner; and several of the younger boys, especially little James Dudley, knew that it was by his words and example that they were saved from the bullying of some of the elder ones. Only two boys regarded Ronald with dislike; and these were the very leaders of all mischief—Tom Pritchard and George Dundas. It was they who invented the funny names for him, as they termed them; such as "Peter the Hermit," "Praying Aldy," "John Knox," and many others. At first the others had joined in the laugh which these names elicited; but by degrees the larger number ceased to see fun in tormenting a fellow, as they said, who was ever ready with a kind word and action. If he liked to pray, where was

the harm? it would not be a bad plan if some more of them copied his example. And so, on the whole, Ronald's days at school passed pleasantly.

Just as he was starting to go out, on the Saturday we are writing of, Dr. Bowles accosted him: "Macintosh," he said, "Mrs. Bowles and I are going to London, and if you would like to accompany us, you can come also."

Ronald's first impulse was to say, "Thank you, sir; I should like so much to go;" but as the words rose to his lips, the remembrance of the old woman, and her disappointment at his non-appearance on the Saturday he had missed, made him hesitate, and with an air of embarrassment he said, "Many thanks, sir; but I am afraid I can't go to town this afternoon; I—" Here he hesitated.

Dr. Bowles looked at him wonderingly. "Why, Ronald," he said, "it was only the other day you expressed a wish to Mrs. Bowles to go again to town. What has changed you? Some special game at cricket, I suppose. Well, well, take your own choice; you know I never interfere with your Saturday pleasures. But I must go now, or I'll be too late." And without letting Ronald say another word, he was off.

There was a sore sense of disappointment in Ronald's heart as, some minutes afterwards, he set off across

the fields to Susan's cottage. He knew he was doing right; but just then it cost him a struggle. Yet, had not the Captain under whose banner he fought said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself"? and had he not vowed that, as far as possible, he would try to help the weak and suffering ones of earth as a true Knight of the Cross? So with a more cheerful heart he sped on his way, the pleasant summer air and bright sky cheering him. He saw one or two of the boys as he left the playground, and shouted to them that he would be back for a game in an hour or two; but he did not stay to talk to them just then, waving back even his own favourite little Sir James Dudley, pointing to him that he was off for a walk.

Susan's cottage lay in the very opposite direction from the river, and it was impossible for even a quick walker to go to both places and return to the school within two hours; so Ronald made up his mind to go straight to the cottage. On his way he fancied he caught a glimpse of two boys crossing the fields which led to the river, and wondered if they could be any of the school-boys, but the distance was too great to let him distinguish the figures.

He soon reached the cottage, which stood alone, and, to his no small disappointment, found the door

locked. As his knocking met with no answer, he concluded that the old woman must be asleep, and her little grandson, who took care of her, out. He lingered about for some minutes, in hopes that the child might be playing near; but seeing no traces of him, he very unwillingly retraced his steps. He went back slower than he had come: he had given up a great pleasure, and yet had been of no use to the old woman. It seemed hard. Still he felt he had done right; and by the time he reached the field where his companions were playing at cricket, he had entirely got over his disappointment.

“Come along, Macintosh,” was the greeting he received. “We have been waiting for you; come and help us.” And in a moment the boy was engrossed in his favourite sport.

Dr. Bowles did not return from London till late, and the boys only saw him at evening worship. Sunday passed in the usual way: the hours after church services, or rather between them, had become doubly pleasant to Ronald since Dudley’s arrival, for somehow the little home-sick fellow had found out that Macintosh was often alone then, and never ill-natured if a little boy disturbed him; so with fear at first the child had slipped away from some of the rougher boys to try and keep a promise he had given

his mother to spend some portion of the Sunday as much in quiet as he could. He had told Ronald this, and from that day the two contrived to be together for a quiet hour, reading a little, talking a little, till, despite the difference in their years, these two became great friends; and in helping the little boy, Ronald rejoiced to feel he was doing the Master's work.

On Monday more than one of the boys remarked that the face of their usually kind master wore a troubled, stern look. After breakfast, ere lessons began, he spoke:—"I have a question to put, to which I desire a truthful answer. It has come to my knowledge that one or more of the boys from this school, in defiance of my most express commands, were seen at the river fishing on Saturday; and now I request that the boy or boys who were guilty of the act will stand up and say so, in order that the odium of it may at least not fall on the wrong party."

A dead silence fell on all, but no response was made, no boy stood up. Dr. Bowles looked sorely grieved. He threw a pained glance at each; then he said,—“I number amongst my so-called young gentlemen a coward as well as a law-breaker.”

Still no word was spoken. Then the question was

put to each, "Were you at the river on Saturday; and if so, were you fishing in it?" Each boy answered, "No;" some, it might be, less distinctly than others, but all in the negative. Dr. Bowles fairly groaned, but dismissed the boys without another word.

Presently, to his no small amazement, Ronald Macintosh was requested to go to Dr. Bowles in his study. The look he met as he entered the room was one to be remembered. Mingled with sternness, there was in it so much of heart-felt grief. "Ronald Macintosh," were the words which greeted him, "had I been asked which of all the boys under my care I believed to be the most truly Christian one, I would have said it was you. Deep, therefore, is my grief when I find that, so far from that being the case, you have proved yourself a breaker of the laws of the school, a coward, and, much as I dislike to use the word, a liar!"

The lad's hot Highland blood was up in a moment, and, without thinking to whom he spoke, he exclaimed passionately, proudly,—“Dr. Bowles, take back those words; no man living shall use them to me! I am neither liar nor coward, and repeat, I was never near the river.”

A dead silence followed, in which, through the

fearful conflict in his mind, conscience was already speaking. Ah! Ronald, it said, is this having the meek and lowly spirit of a follower of Him who, when he was reviled, reviled not again? True, you are falsely accused; but it was certainly not your part to speak in that way to your master, whatever he said to you.

The silence was broken by Dr. Bowles. "The evidence I have of your guilt, sir, is an undeniable one; but at present I cannot enter either on that subject or on the punishment awaiting you. Retire to your own room, till you have at least gained the mastery over your temper, so that I can speak further to you;" and without a word, but with a bursting heart, the boy went to his room, bolted the door, and cried passionately.

What did it all mean? he asked himself. Why did suspicion rest on him? and, above all, what was the evidence which Dr. Bowles had received, and which he said was conclusive of his guilt? Guilty in this matter he was not; but when the first burst of anger passed, very plainly did he see how he had sinned: he had been guilty of disrespect to Dr. Bowles, and had sinned against God by his outburst of passion. Ah! was this the way in which he was to hold up the banner of the Lord? What, he asked himself,

were some of the marks which the true soldiers of Christ bore, by which all men could distinguish them as easily as they could the Crusaders by their garb and outward mark? He knew them well; only the day before had he been talking to little Dudley about them—"love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness." Ah! how he had failed; no wonder, he said, that he needed the cross which was laid on him by the unjust suspicion, when God knew all the evil that was in him. Then, throwing himself on his knees, he told all to the One who by his Spirit hath said,—“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us.” Then he rose quieted, having sought that the Lord would stand by him and give him strength to endure false accusation calmly, and yet clear him from it in his own way and time. One duty lay plainly before him,—he must ask Dr. Bowles’s forgiveness for the manner in which he had spoken to him.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE BANNER-BEARER IN TROUBLE.

Shall Jesus bear the cross alone,  
And all the world go free?  
No! there's a cross for every one,  
And there's a cross for me.



TRUE Ronald again entered the study, another boy had been there, one who went of his own accord. A rumour had arisen in the school-room that Ronald Macintosh was the boy accused of having been seen fishing in the river, and of having denied the fact. True, the report was not believed by all; but, at the first flash of it, Sir James Dudley had left the school-room, and sought the much-dreaded study of the headmaster. He entered the room, however, unabashed, his head erect, the brown eyes sparkling with indignation. "Dr. Bowles," he said, "I have come to tell you that you are wrong. Ronald Macintosh never broke a rule of yours; and he never, no never, told a lie. I don't know who did; but I

*do* know he did *not*. Why, I believe he'd sooner die than say what was not true. You don't know, sir, how good and kind he is, nor all he has done for us little fellows; and—and he loves God, sir, just as my own mother does, and has been trying all he can to make me a true Christian boy also; and I will say, sir, you are wrong in thinking it was him, even if you beat me for saying so."

The brave little heart was giving way when the doctor spoke. "No, Dudley, I will certainly never beat any boy for defending a friend in whom he believes. It grieves me, as much as it does you, to think evil of Ronald. It grieves me more, far more than a little boy like you can understand, for I also thought highly of him; but this much I will tell you, the proof of his guilt cannot be put aside: his fishing-rod was found, at least a part of it with his name on it, close by the spot where Mr. Lawson's man saw the boy fishing, and found a trout left behind when the fisher saw him coming and took flight. Had the evidence not been so strong, I would have refused to believe it could have been Ronald Macintosh."

The brown eyes fell, but only for one moment. Again they were raised with a look full of confidence to the master's face. "But, Dr. Bowles, I saw Ronald when he left the play-ground, and he had no fishing-

rod in his hand; and he was only an hour away, and he could not have had time to be down by the river and catch a trout there, and be back so soon. No, sir, depend on it, Ronald is not the boy who broke the rule of the school."

Dr. Bowles smiled. "Well, Dudley," he said, "he has at least a brave defender in you, and rest assured I will sift the matter fully, ere the sentence of punishment is pronounced. As to the fact of his having no fishing-rod in his hand when he left the school, that carries little weight with it; for I believe he had an accomplice, who probably was out of the bounds ere Ronald left, and who, no doubt, had the rod in his possession. The man declares he saw two boys run away; although he believes only one, and that the biggest of the two, was fishing. It's a sad story altogether. Now go, Dudley, and leave me."

Just then the door opened, and Macintosh entered; and little Dudley, at a sign from the master, left them alone. The anger had passed from the lad's spirit, and he was calm now, as he asked Dr. Bowles to forgive him for the hasty words he had spoken, and for any disrespect he had shown to him. The pardon was granted, as far as that offence went; but the tone in which it was accorded was cold and

hard. "And now, sir," said the master after a pause, "I repeat the accusation already made, of the truth of which I believe I hold the evidence beside me, that you broke the law of the school on Saturday last by fishing in the river for trout, knowing that a severe penalty would be inflicted on any boy so doing; and more, that after having done so, you kept a cowardly silence, when the request was made that the boy or boys (for it is believed you had an accomplice) should stand up and confess the deed. And, still further, to the sin of disobedience you added the greater one of falsehood, by solemnly denying the committal of the deed when the question was separately put to you. Now, sir, what have you to answer to these accusations?"

Ronald's face was crimson with indignation; but he controlled himself to speak calmly. "I have only one answer to give, and that, as in God's presence, I do give. Dr. Bowles, I am *not* guilty of any one of the things you bring against me, on what evidence I know not. I never was even *near* the river on Saturday. I was only one hour out of the school bounds, and then I went in a different direction. So, in the denying it, I was neither a coward nor a liar."

The last word was uttered with difficulty. Dr.

Bowles looked steadily at the bold, fearless eyes that met his own. Could they, he was asking himself, belong to one who was acting the part of a hypocrite? And for the first time he was staggered in his belief. Still, what of the fishing-rod? Without a word he produced it.

An unmistakable look of surprise and pain crossed the boy's face as he said, "That is my fishing-rod, sir. Did you take it from the shelf in our room?"

"No, Ronald Macintosh," was the stern reply; "it was found by the river-side, dropped by the boy who was fishing there. Your name is on it; and, despite the pain it causes me to say it, I can have no more conclusive evidence that you are the guilty one. Besides, I remember, only *too* plainly, your refusal to go to London with Mrs. Bowles and me, after you had expressed a strong wish to do so only the night before. Even then your manner struck me as strange; now it is easily accounted for. O Ronald, Ronald! I am sorely disappointed in you," and as he spoke he leant his head on his hands in sore distress of spirit.

The amount of apparent evidence against him fairly overcame Ronald, as well as his master's grief; but he spoke out. "Dr. Bowles, listen to me one moment, ere you condemn me thus. I see plainly

what cause you have to do so. I know not who is guilty in this matter, but I am not. I never took that rod from the place I put it in when I first came here; who took it, I cannot say. I am almost certain it was in its place when I left the house. I did not accompany you to London, much as I wished to do so, because I thought my duty was to remain here."

At these words the master raised his head. "Your duty?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where, then, did you go during the hour that you confess to being absent from bounds?"

"Do you know a solitary cottage, sir, that stands on the part of Mr. Lawson's grounds the farthest off from the village?"

Dr. Bowles nodded assent.

"Well, sir, I went there, intending to read God's Word to a poor woman who is bedridden, to whom I have read before. I had heard she was sorely disappointed at my having missed the previous Saturday, and that was the reason of my refusal to accompany you. I see now I should have told you all; but I feared you might think it was ostentatious of me to do so."

Dr. Bowles's eyes brightened. "You have proof,

then, that the hour you were out of the play-ground you spent in reading God's Word to a poor woman?"

"I have no proof, sir, if my own word is to be doubted, for I found the cottage door locked, and so had to return home. You know, sir, that cottage is nearly half an hour's walk from here, and as I was back in an hour I could not have had time to read to old Susan."

"Well, but did no one see you at the cottage? Because, if there be evidence that you were seen there, it would be conclusive you were not at the river, as from the points of distance you could not have been both at the cottage and at the river."

"No, sir, I saw no one; though I looked in all directions for little Tommy Fegan, Susan's grandson, who lives with her, I did not see him."

Dr. Bowles's brow darkened. It was strange, he said to himself, that no evidence of the truth of the boy's assertions could be found, whilst the overwhelming evidence of his guilt had been produced. There was but one course open to him, and that was to wait a few days ere pronouncing sentence on the boy and writing a full account of the transaction to Mr. Macleod. In the meantime, Ronald, except in school hours, was to be separated from the other boys, and the master would make every effort to

discover the real truth of the matter. The belief in Ronald's guilt, which had at first possessed him, was shaken; not only by little Dudley's testimony, but by the lad's clear, steady eye, and the truthful character he had hitherto borne. And not altogether in vain had Ronald's steady uplifting of the royal banner proved. In the school-room, with the exception of two or three, there was but one opinion held on the subject, and that was, that Ronald was innocent; but how the boy suffered during these days none knew, save the God who allowed him to go through such a trial for the purifying of his faith and the chastening of his proud spirit. Closely was he watched by master and tutors during the week, but none could detect any signs of guilt or fear: steadily he went through with his lessons; fearlessly he bent his knee in private prayer, morning and evening.

Yet the day was drawing near when, if no evidence of his innocence appeared, the disgraceful sentence of expulsion from the school would be pronounced against him. During these days Sir James Dudley spent every spare moment out-of-doors prowling round the spot where the fishing-rod had been found, feeling in every place in hopes of finding some trace of the guilty one, but in vain. Dr. Bowles had him-



self visited the sick woman, and she had confirmed the truth of the boy's story, of his reading to her from time to time; but of that Saturday she could say nothing, except that she knew she had slept most of the afternoon.

Never had the doctor felt more perplexed. If Ronald was innocent, who then was the guilty one? Once more he publicly appealed to the boys, telling them that the sentence could be no longer put off—the next day he must decide, and implored them, as in God's sight, not to let punishment fall on the innocent.

As he spoke, a short, stifled sob was heard, which most of those who noticed it thought came from Ronald's breast. But Dudley's sharp ears had caught the sound, and knew the sob was not Ronald's: quietly he noticed that it came from a little boy, George Dundas, and as he was known to be the fag and friend of Pritchard, the only boy in the school who bore malice to Macintosh, Dudley knew that sob was from no grief at Ronald's disgrace; and a hope sprung up in the noble boy's heart that he had a clue to the real offender.

After lessons, he sought out Dundas, and, without asking him any questions, spoke of Ronald, how good, and kind, and loving he was; reminding Dun-

das how he had got him not long before out of a scrape ; and then concluded by saying that Ronald, like George himself, was an orphan, with no father and mother to care for him ; “ and, maybe,” said the boy, “ his uncle will be so angry he will turn him to the door, and poor Ronald will become a wanderer on the face of the earth.”

George listened in silence, not condescending to answer one word ; but some hours after he sought the master’s study. Once inside it, he broke down, sobbing like a child. “ Dr. Bowles,” he said, “ I have come to say, I wish to go home—to leave school—I can’t be good here. I’m turning worse and worse every day ; and my mother, on her death-bed, made me promise that I’d try to be an honourable, truthful boy, and I can’t be that here. Please, sir, don’t ask me why ; but write to my guardian, and ask that I may go home.”

Poor George ! he, too, like Ronald, was an orphan boy ; but, unlike him, he had never sought a strength beyond his own to hold him up ; and since coming to Dr. Bowles’s he had got so entirely under the influence of Pritchard, that almost unconsciously he had entered on a downward course.

Dr. Bowles was much amazed. “ Why, George,” he said, “ what is wrong ? . Why can you not be

truthful and honourable here? It is my great desire to render so all the boys under my care." Then, as if a sudden thought had come into his mind, he said quickly, "Has the story of the fishing anything to do with your distress? George, do you know who is the real culprit?"

No words came; no reply to the question; only loud sobs, as if the boy's heart was breaking. But in a minute or so the master caught the words which sent a thrill of joy through him—"I must not, *will* not tell. Only, sir, don't send away Macintosh; indeed, indeed, he does not deserve to be punished. He is not guilty—he knows nothing about it; but I must not tell who is. I will not be a tell-tale."

Ere Dr. Bowles could reply, a knock came to the door; and little Dudley entered, followed by a tall young man in the dress of a peasant. The brown eyes danced with a look of joy and triumph, such as they had not worn for many a day. In a few words his story was told. Prowling about by the side of the river, as he had so often done lately, that morning he had met the young lad who was now with him, and who had asked him, "Be you one o' the lads that live in the school yonder?"

He had answered, "Yes."

Then said his questioner, "Canst tell if the lad wi'

the scar on his face, that was fishing here last Saturday, caught any fish?"

At these words Dudley had sprung up, and eagerly asked for an explanation.

"You see," said the young man, "I was comin' along that day to see a friend on the other side o' the river, and was meanin' to cross at the bridge farther down, when a good-looking lad wi' a mark on his face comed up to me, and asked if I belonged to these parts. And when I said, 'No; I comed from a farm a good bit off,' he says, 'All right then; I may ask you: I'm going to fish hereabouts, and I've got a new rod, but the tackle's got all wrong—would you lend me a hand to put it to rights?' So I says that I will; and we sorts it all, and I left him a-fishing. And I guessed he was one o' the scholars in the big school; and so I just wanted to know if he had caught many fish."

"So," said Dudley, addressing the master, "I brought him right off to you, sir; for he says he can tell in a minute what boy he spoke to; and, sir, you know there is only one in the school has a mark, and that's Pritchard. And," said Dudley, unable to suppress his delight, "I knew it wasn't Macintosh—it *could* not have been."

The matter was soon settled; the moment Pritchard

saw the lad enter the school-room, he broke down and confessed all. He was the guilty one; but he had not intended, in taking the rod, to implicate Ronald. He took it because it was the only one he could lay his hands on; and fear and cowardice together made him silent when he found that the transaction was discovered, and the guilty one called on to declare himself.

When the truth was discovered, the feeling of the boys was without exception one of gladness that Ronald was proved innocent. We need not add that Pritchard was sent home; such an example could not be tolerated; and from that day George Dundas spoke no more of leaving the school. The lesson he had received was a salutary one for him. It was he who was the second boy whom Mr. Lawson's man had seen running off across the field. But though George knew that Pritchard was the offender, he had taken no part in the transaction, and knew nothing of Ronald's rod having been made use of. He only saw Pritchard fishing, as he was strolling past from another field. But taking in the story at a glance, when he saw the man coming down the river from the other side, and Pritchard throw down the rod and make for the school, George had run also, afraid of being caught and suspected of trespassing. Fear

of Pritchard had kept him silent when Dr. Bowles had spoken.

And what of Ronald? He had suffered much during these days, and learned some needful lessons; but calmly at last he had committed his way unto the Lord; and now it was with a heart full of gratitude unto him that he returned thanks that his character was cleared, and that the royal banner he upheld had not, through his sin, been disgraced. His influence in the school from that hour became stronger; and more than one boy was led openly to take his stand on the Lord's side, fight under his banner, and seek for that which is better than gold, and more to be desired than rubies.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CLIMBING SCHIEHALLION.

“ My God, I thank thee, who hast made  
The earth so bright ;  
So full of splendour and of joy,  
Beauty and light ;  
So many glorious things are here,  
Noble and right.”



HIGHLAND picnic on a bright August day, when the mountain-side where it is to be held is purple with heather, and the only clouds visible in the bright blue sky are soft, small, white fleecy ones, and young faces are glowing with pleasure at the prospect before them,—who that has ever enjoyed such a recreation can ever forget it ?

Holiday-time has once more come round, and Ben-  
vourd House rings with the voices of the assembled  
youngsters. Ronald is there, bringing with him from  
school not only a goodly number of prizes, but a  
letter from Dr. Bowles of high commendation for the  
good influence he has exercised over the other boys.

And Eric has also returned from his Edinburgh visit, which had lasted some months. At times there is a more thoughtful expression on his face than of yore, which Mrs. Macleod notes with satisfaction, though the cause of it has not been disclosed: only the All-seeing One, who directed the boy's course to the house where, to human eye, He was shut out, knows the real cause of the grave though as yet unsatisfied look that at times flits over the face of the heedless boy.

As in the court of Ahab there dwelt a God-fearing Obadiah, and in the corrupt palace of a Cæsar there were souls who loved and served the Lord Jesus, so in the household of the Rosses, whose God seemed to be the prince of this world, there lived a child whose heart the Lord had opened—a little dark-eyed boy of Spanish origin, the orphan boy of a dead sister of Mrs. Ross, who had married a young Spaniard, and in her life-time had been cast off and disowned by her friends for the misalliance, as they termed it; but when both father and mother died, leaving their only child homeless and penniless, Mr. Ross had insisted on taking the orphan and bringing him up with their own children. And so, at the age of six years, little Pedro became an inmate of their home. A child too thoughtful for his years, shy, and



sensitive, he never really amalgamated with the family: kindly treated in one way, neglected in others, he lived in a world of his own, and wove fanciful dreams, and created heroes and heroines for himself; and even in the midst of his lessons, visions of the sunny land of his birth and his childhood were ever before him.

No one understood him; and life was beginning to cloud around him, when sickness came, not serious, but lingering. Into the house from which He had been tried to be excluded the Lord entered, and taking the little orphan boy by the hand, led him apart, so to speak, and spoke comfortably to him there; and from that bed of sickness the child rose no longer sad. A new love had come into his lonely heart,—a new, never-failing, never-changing Friend had become his; memories of almost forgotten teaching had come back to him, and the Saviour his parents had loved and served had whispered the "Peace, be still," to the weary young heart.

Few noticed the change, unless it were Alick and Clara. "Pedro looks happier now," they said, "and is far more obliging than he used to be."

And his tutor remarked, "Pedro begins to learn fast now, and no longer dreams over his lessons. Take care, or he will outstrip you all."

But Pedro dreamed still, only not in lesson-time, and made heroes of those who took his fancy; and so it came to pass that when the little Highland boy came amongst them, and spoke kind words to the child who was an orphan like himself, Pedro exalted him into a hero, and almost worshipped him. And when, after a short acquaintance, he saw that Eric shrank with amazement from many of the ways of the house, and refused to spend the Sundays in idleness or play—keeping the promise he had given his uncle and aunt, that he would set aside some portion of the Lord's-day for Bible study—little Pedro's heart beat with joy as he thought he had found one who had learned to love Jesus, and would help him on in the heavenward path.

Eric saw this, and shrank from accepting a character to which he had no claim: for earthly goods, not heavenly ones, were Eric's ambition; the crown of the world's wealth, not the unfading one of glory, was the crown he longed to wear, though the influence of his Christian upbringing still lingered in his heart, and made him grieved at living in a house where God's blessing was not daily sought in family prayer as at Benvourd, and God's day not revered and kept holy as it was there.

All this he told Pedro; but the boy remained

unshaken in his belief that his new friend was a Christian, and often appealed to him on matters of difficulty. In vain Eric expostulated, till at last the question arose, Why should he not seek to be what Pedro thought he was? And at times a real desire, born of the Holy Spirit, arose in his heart that he too, like Ronald and Pedro, might be a child of God; and through the haziness of his desires there glimmered in the far distance a longing for something better than gold. Pedro's strong belief in him did good to the volatile boy, and enabled him often to say "No" to his cousins when they desired to lead him into temptation. "They are all very kind," he wrote to his aunt some weeks after his arrival, "but somehow life has a different aim, apparently, here from what it has at Benvourd. The cousins think a great deal about dress, and go to evening parties very often, or else have them in their own house; but Alick and I get on famously. And I like school, tell uncle, and we play no end of games; but for all that I often think of you all. You, aunt, would like Pedro; he is a splendid little fellow, and as good as can be; he sometimes reminds me of Ronald. He has taken such a fancy to me, I can't think why; but for all that I am glad he has."

And now Eric was once again back at Benvourd,

full of glee, on the day we write of, as the party, accompanied by Mr. Macleod, and Clara and Alick Ross—who were again in the neighbourhood—set off at early morn for a picnic on the side, if not on the summit of Schiehallion.

The long drive at last came to an end. Nora, who had never been there before, was in raptures at the beauty of the scene; though, as they drew near the mountain, they saw with anxiety that a mist had arisen and was covering the mountain-top, wreathing it round as with many folds.

“Here we are at last,” said Ronald, as he sprang off the hardy Highland pony on which he had ridden for miles alongside of the waggonette. “See, Nora, yonder is the inn where we are to put up the ponies whilst we climb the hill. Doesn’t it look grand—Schiehallion I mean—towering so high, though you can’t see its head just now, as it has got its night-cap on; but the wind will soon blow that off—don’t be afraid.”

But Mr. Macleod eyed with a suspicious look the rising mist and a bank of dark clouds that was now distinctly visible on the horizon. “One thing is certain, boys,” he said,—“we must have a guide, especially if there is any idea of your trying to reach the top.”

"Oh yes, uncle," said a number of voices in one breath; "we are bent on going to the very top. Why, that is to be the great fun."

"Girls and all!" said Mr. Macleod.—"What say you, Miss Stewart?"

That lady had kindly accompanied the party, chiefly to look after the girls. She shook her head, saying, "I am afraid the girls will hardly reach the top, but we'll try."

And so, amid much fun and laughter, the ascent began, Mr. Macleod having succeeded in finding a shepherd well accustomed to act as a guide. One thing only he insisted on,—the picnic on the hill-side must be abandoned if they had any intentions of reaching the top. Some slight refreshments they might carry with them; but the dinner must take place after they had come down.

The view, even half-way up the hill, was charming,—mountains, peak on peak, rising around, giving them a foretaste of the more expansive view to be seen from the summit. Bravely they pressed on, especially the mountain-bred children, whose limbs were well accustomed to the act of climbing, and whose feet loved to press the springy heather. More and more solitary did the scene become as they ascended, and left even the lonely Farm Inn far below. God's

impress seemed set on all around. Surely the majesty and power of the Almighty Creator are wonderfully felt amid mountain scenery. All the children felt it, though in greater or less degree: it was as if they had come nearer God than ever before. But it was Ronald who, as he walked between his uncle and the shepherd, uttered almost involuntarily the words: "Great is the Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite." "Praise the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights."

As he spoke, the shepherd reverently lifted his cap. "Ay," he said, "it's on the heights we can best feel as if we can best praise the Lord, young sir; yet down in the vales he can hear our voices also, and like sweet melody, our songs o' praise sound in the ear o' the Almighty. But it's grand to walk the heights and to watch the clouds as they gather on the mountain-tops. But 'deed, sirs, I likena' the look o' the clouds noo. I much doubt our reaching the top. An' we must take heed, for the mists gather quickly; an' well though I know the way, still it's hard to find your whereabouts in the mist. I think the leddies, at least, should go no further, but rest here while we go on a bit further an' see what like it looks."

There was a loud demur at this from Nora and even Clara. "O uncle!" and "O Mr. Macleod! let us

go on too; we will not be beat—we must get to the top.”

But just then rain began to fall. They had already got into the midst of a cloud; and somewhat abashed, they stood still to consider.

The guide looked despondingly. “I fear, sirs, even if we could reach the top, there would be no view; and my advice is that we should all turn and go down, for the rain is going to be heavy.”

But his voice was drowned by the three lads all exclaiming in one breath: “No, no! let’s get on. Who minds a little rain? We’re not salt or sugar that will melt. Let the ladies stay here till we go up, and we’ll be back in no time. Do let us try.”

“Well, sirs, if you’re bent on it we can try; but I warn you, you’ll get nothing but a wetting for your trouble. However, I’ll take you round the shoulder of the hill, and look around; but if the mist be thick there I’ll not go one step farther, for there’s danger farther up.”

So with this decision they were obliged to be satisfied; and the guide, putting the ladies, as he said, under the shelter of an overhanging rock, and leaving them under the care of Mr. Macleod, set off with the boys.

“Here we are, back again, uncle,” said Eric, as he

bounded down the hill, about a quarter of an hour after they had set off with the guide. "When we got round the shoulder of the hill we found ourselves enveloped in mist, and Sandy wouldn't let us go a step farther. Isn't it a shame?"

At this moment the guide, accompanied by Ronald and Alick, appeared, and accosting Mr. Macleod, said, "'Deed, sir, we must get down hill as fast as possible, for the rain's getting worse, and these hill-showers are heavy, and wetting ones as well; so let's be off."

Amid much mirth, despite the disappointment and the rain, the party hastened downwards; but ere they reached the inn they were thoroughly soaked. Once inside, peat fires were blazing; and much laughter was expended as the girls presently appeared in the little parlour where the picnic dinner was to take place, attired in all manner of fantastic dresses, kindly lent by the women of the house whilst their own wet garments were drying. Miss Stewart, attired in the hostess's Sunday dress, looked strange indeed; while the girls, in woollen petticoats, coarse worsted stockings, and bright-coloured shortgowns, evoked shouts of laughter from the boys, who, on their part, were running about without boots or stockings. But, notwithstanding, the day's excursion was fully enjoyed by the youngsters, and with great glee they rehearsed



their adventures in the evening to Mrs. Macleod ; and in after-days it became an established joke how a whole party had set off to go to the top of Schiehallion, and were nearly lost in the mist.

More than once during those pleasant holidays did Ronald find his way to the cottage in the glen, and many a pleasant talk he had with old nurse, who still cherished the vague hope that somewhere in London Ronald would meet with her lost laddie.

It was strange enough that never, during the six weeks they spent together, did the three children meet at the Wishing-Well. Ronald sat often there alone, as in olden days, and mentally reviewed the scene with the passing stranger, renewing in God's presence the resolution he had made, the vow he had taken, to serve under the royal banner. But Nora specially avoided the place: truth to tell, she was afraid just then to stop and think, afraid to take a glance into her own heart, for Clara's influence was telling upon her, and she had made up her mind to have a sip at the pleasures of life ere she really drank at the well of living waters ; and she thought more just then about the gold and ruby crown of this world than of the one which endureth for ever. Ronald's quick eye marked the change in his loved sister, and he in part guessed the cause, but he

deemed silence the best course then to be pursued, though he did occasionally throw in a word of counsel. But he saw that in her happy home she was all unconsciously learning many of the qualities which characterize the woman who is "above rubies." The wood was piled up on the altar of her heart and life, only awaiting the fire from Heaven, which sooner or later, he was sure, would fall.

To his brother, Eric spoke little of the new thoughts which had begun to stir in his breast; but he did talk to him of Pedro, and of the affection the little fellow had taken for him. And Ronald felt, without having been told, that an influence, powerful in God's hand for good, had begun to touch the life of his younger brother.

Once again the parting day came round; and this time the separation would be of longer duration, for in six months Ronald was to leave school and begin business in London with his cousin, and Eric was then to take his place at Dr. Bowles' for a whole year, after which he was to enter a mercantile house in Liverpool, from whence he would proceed to China. And so amidst tears the orphans parted once more—Eric returning for a while to Edinburgh, whither by-and-by Nora would follow him; and when the last evening came, and Ronald raised the hymn,—


“ Here we suffer grief and pain ;  
Here we meet to part again ;  
In heaven we part no more,”—

Nora broke down and sobbed like a child. Nor was she much quieted when in prayer her uncle asked, “ that all the party then at the throne of grace might one day, through the merits of Jesus, meet before the throne on high, and obtain from his hand a crown of glory, better far than gold and rubies.”

## CHAPTER IX

### TWO ANGELS.

“Do not cheat thy heart, and tell her  
Grief will pass away;  
Hope for fairer times in future,  
And forget to-day.  
Tell her, if you will, that sorrow  
Need not come in vain;  
Tell her that the lesson taught her  
Far outweighs the pain.”

 COME, Nora, make haste and finish dressing your hair; the guests will be arriving before long, and I want so much to see how you look with your lovely diadem on. Papa says you will be the beauty of the room to-night. Do make haste, dear.”

Clara Ross was the speaker of these words, as she and her cousin Nora stood before a large mirror, engaged in dressing for an evening party which was to take place at the Rosses' house in Edinburgh, whither Nora had lately arrived to spend some weeks.

Three years and more have elapsed since we accompanied the cousins on their picnic up Schiehallion,

and Nora is a young lady now—a very pretty one, we must confess. She stands now as when we first saw her, poising the costly diadem in her hand, wearing, however, a more thoughtful face than she did then. She is attired in a simple dress of white, worked muslin, her dark-brown, wavy hair simply braided, but caught up at the back of her beautifully-formed head by a comb, from which it fell in a profuse quantity of natural curls down her neck. Her face still has the same sweet, open expression of her childhood's days; but there is a sad look in her blue eyes as they rest on the diadem.

In reply to her cousin's words she said, resolutely, "I *am* finished, Clara, but I shall not wear the diadem to-night; I am too young for such an ornament. Another year, perhaps, I may, but not yet. I tried it on, and it felt strange. I could not wear it;" and as she spoke the girl raised her head, as if to efface the mark the coronet had left on her hair. As she did so a slight shudder passed over her, and words she had thought forgotten recurred to her memory. Once more old nurse's voice seemed sounding in her ear: "I'm wonderin', my lambie, what kind o' a crown is to sit on your bonnie brow. Is it to be the crown o' a vain world's folly, or the everlastin' one your mother prayed might rest there?" Then, as if to

stifle thought, she put the diadem once more into the casket and shut it in with a sharp click.

“Well, Nora, you are a queer girl, and no mistake,” said Clara. “Not going to wear your beautiful diadem after all, and you know Walter Lushington and Alick, and even little Pedro, have been longing to see you with it on.”

“No; for once you’re wrong, Clara,” said Nora, testily; “Walter and Alick may have said so, but not Pedro: boy though he is, he would rather one day see another crown on my head.” And as she spoke she took the casket and locked it in her drawer.

Clara gazed at her in amazement. “Well, perhaps you are right about Pedro, but then he has such peculiar, old-fashioned notions. But what’s wrong with you to-night, Nora? you’re not a bit like yourself. I don’t believe you’ll enjoy the party at all in that mood; and really, you know, it’s your first quite grown-up ball, and you don’t look a bit glad about it.”

“Well, Clara, to tell the truth, I don’t feel glad. I wonder if it is the right sort of life for me, or”—and her lip quivered as she spoke—“if mamma would have cared for me entering on it; aunt does not, and Ronald does not, and—” But the sentence was left unfinished, for Clara broke in indignantly,—

“Papa and mamma think it is the right sort of life

for my sisters and me, so why not for you? Though you are different from us, too; I suppose it is your bringing up that has made the difference."

And Clara was right; the blessed influence of her Christian upbringing had told on Nora, and although this was now the third winter she had spent in the Rosses' house, she remained quite different from them: she had developed into a truly beautiful character. Not in vain had the example of her aunt and uncle's daily life proved; not in vain had the seed of good been planted in her heart. From everything mean and unwomanly Nora shrank; with all her cheerfulness, there was never levity in thought or word; from senseless frivolity her heart recoiled; and many noticed that the light joke or malicious remark ceased when Nora drew near. The charm of true, noble womanhood was around her; and even her young admirers checked the idle compliment or flattering words, with which they were wont to greet other girls, when they spoke to her. Yet her winning manners attracted all who saw her, and her influence was always exercised for good: she was still the gentle, helpful hand in a sick-room she had been in her childish days; her voice had become even sweeter in reading and singing than of yore; and in all household matters she was an expert, as even Mrs.

Ross testified. But the one thing needful was wanting still : man had done his part,—the Christian training had been given, the wood was piled on the altar ; only, the fire from Heaven, the breath of the Holy Spirit, was still awaiting to set it aglow.

The girls were dressed at last, and ready to go downstairs ; yet Nora still lingered, she scarcely knew why. Was it that in her heart she shrank from the knowledge that this evening was a sort of crisis in her life ? Hitherto she had been regarded only in the light of a school-girl ; now, when her seventeenth birthday was fairly passed, she was acknowledged in that character no longer ; and Mr. Ross had openly declared that the ball that evening was in honour of little Nora's *début*. From henceforth she knew that invitations to dances and parties of all sorts would pour in and have to be accepted ; and something within her whispered that ere long the crown of this world's folly would get so firmly set on her head that it would be difficult to detach it. "How was it," she asked herself impatiently, "that, even as she descended the stairs, the Wishing-Well, with all its surroundings, rose so clearly in memory's eye ? Was the life she was about to enter on the best preparation for becoming what she had wished for that day, of seeking what her mother had de-



sired she might possess—the “wisdom which is above rubies”?

Just then the postman's bell rang, and before she entered the ball-room, a servant, silver salver in hand, gave her a letter. “From uncle,” she said to Clara. “I'll not read it till the party is over;” but even as she spoke, her eyes rested on the words, “In haste.” A feeling of deadly faintness came over her, and, seizing Mr. Ross's arm, who had come out of the room to look for Clara, she said, “Oh, please take me to the library for a moment; I fear there is something wrong at Benvourd.”

And so it proved. In a few words Mr. Macleod told that Minnie, the only girl and pet of the house, lay at the gates of death. “She has asked for you, Nora, more than once. We hardly like to say Come; yet we know how much you love her. Your aunt is fairly worn out with grief and three nights' watching, and I can only say your presence would be a comfort to us all.”

Impatiently Nora threw aside the letter and unfastened the string of pearls round her neck, her only ornament. “How could uncle doubt I would come! Minnie, my pet Minnie, dying, and I not there! Mr. Ross, I must start at once; the last coach north starts in an hour; I know all about it.

Uncle went by it the last time he was here. Please let Williams get me a cab. I'll be ready in a few minutes."

Mr. Ross interrupted her. "Nora, you cannot go to-night; think of the hour—and alone, too—it is out of the question. I am very sorry for you, dear; just wait till morning, and I will take you back myself. Don't cry, child; your cousin may not be so very ill; naturally a father gets easily alarmed. Just come away, and try to enjoy yourself; this is your first grown-up ball, you know, and—"

But the indignant flash in Nora's eyes stopped him. "Dance, when Minnie is dying, Mr. Ross! and those who have been as father and mother to me are in such grief! Surely you do not mean it. Not for all the balls in the world would I remain away an hour longer from them than I could help. Please do not detain me, or you will break my heart. I can go alone. As you said this morning, I am a woman now, and surely am to be trusted. I do not wish to take any one away from the party; perhaps Susan will come with me to the coach, if she can be spared."

Mr. Ross stood a moment undecided; but seeing that Nora was resolute, he said kindly, "Well, well—I daresay you are right. Go and get ready; we'll catch the coach yet; and I'll speak to Mrs. Ross.

Alick must take my place to-night, and I'll take you to Benvourd myself."

The packing was quickly accomplished, Clara helping and comforting her cousin as much as she could, for in truth she felt for her. "Poor little Minnie," she said—for Clara knew and loved the little one—"how terribly sad it will be if she dies. O Nora, I don't believe she will. Keep up your heart, dear; she'll get round yet."

Nora's tears were falling fast, but she faltered out the words, "If she dies, Clara, it won't be sad for her; she loves Jesus with all her heart, and he'll take care of her. But oh, how auntie and uncle and all of us will miss her. She was my special pet, my little Minnie."

Mrs. Ross came to help. She was put out at this sudden break-up of plans; and although sorry for Nora, still the worldly life she led had in part hardened her heart, and she wished heartily that the ball had been over ere the bad news had come. But she helped forward the packing, bade Nora an affectionate farewell, and telling her husband to come back as soon as possible, she resumed her preparations for the ball.

Wearily sped the hours of the night as the travellers drove along. With a sickening heart Nora

watched the sun rise over the distant hills, wondering all the while whether the spirit of the little child she loved so well had already entered the land "that needeth not the sun;" and in the coach, with strangers around her, Nora prayed as she had never done before—prayed for the life of her little cousin—prayed a very earnest prayer for herself, that God would answer her in these prayers for Christ's sake, and make her truly his child, even as little Minnie was.

It was midnight of the following day before they reached Benvourd, to find Mr. Macleod awaiting them, with the strange, sad light on his countenance that one sometimes sees on the faces of those who have stood by the death-bed of dying Christians, whether that of an aged saint or a little lamb of the Good Shepherd's flock. "Thank God you have come!" he said, as he folded Nora in his arms, hushing as best he could the girl's burst of heart-felt grief, as he gently whispered the words, "Jesus has taken our little daughter to his heavenly fold; she was glad to go, Nora, she loved him so. Hush, my darling—compose yourself—it is well with her; the loss is ours. You are greatly needed here, my child."

He had half carried her into the parlour, and laid her down on the sofa. Quietly he stood by for a

few minutes, with bent head and lowered eyes, letting her give vent to the tears which come so easily from hearts in their first sorrow, and which bring such blessed relief.

Mr. Ross stood by much touched ; there was something in the quiet, resigned, though sorely-stricken look on the father's face that made him wonder. "Thank you for bringing her," had been the courteous greeting he had received ; but now, in this sacred sorrow, he felt almost an intruder. "She must be terribly exhausted," he said, as Nora lay almost stifled with sobbing ; " she has hardly tasted food to-day."

Her uncle bent over her lovingly. "My Nora," he said, "be brave ; help us to say, 'Thy will be done.' Your poor aunt will need all your help. There have been two angels here this evening, darling—one of death and one of life. One hour after our darling fell asleep in Jesus, God sent us another little daughter to comfort us."

In a moment Nora was on her feet. "O uncle, take me to aunt ; I will be brave, indeed I will, God helping me," she added. And amid all his sorrow these words sent a thrill of joy through Mr. Macleod's heart, for hitherto Nora had seemed to feel that she could do all things in her own strength ; but in the

bitter hours of sorrow, and self-reproach, and self-examination through which she had passed that day, she had been brought to see her own weakness as never before.

Very softly she slipped into her aunt's room, and bent for a moment over the bed. "Auntie, dear auntie, I've come," she said; but despite her efforts at self-control, one hot tear fell on the pallid face as she kissed the soft cheek.

A quiet, feeble voice said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord."

No more words were allowed to be spoken then; and Nora, forcing back her blinding tears, turned to look at the babe who had come as a little messenger of comfort into the house of mourning. But Nora would not rest that night till she had taken one look at Minnie as she lay beautiful in death. A smile seemed to rest on the little lips, and the golden hair still lay in curls round the fair face; and as the girl kissed the cold brow, she fancied she saw it already crowned with the everlasting crown which is fairer far than any earthly one of gold and rubies.

## CHAPTER X.

### A HIGHLAND FIELD-PREACHING.

" We bear you the message, the Lamb's invitation;  
The rude world's rude clamour, it floateth above:  
Oh join the sweet song, the glad song of salvation,  
And rest 'neath His banner, the Banner of Love."



**R**IGHT down on Minnie's grave in the Highland churchyard the autumn sunbeams were playing, as Nora, some months after her hasty return to Benvourd, stood there wondering, as so many young hearts have done before her, how the sun could shine and all nature look bright when Minnie was dead. Yet inwardly the young girl was glad too, with a great, quiet, solemn joy; for in her heart light and peace had sprung up, and a sunshine, of which the world knows nothing, was filling the chambers of her soul. The doubting and indecision were ended at last; the neutral flag under which Nora had long tried to fight was put aside; and the young girl had taken her stand as one of the followers of the Lord Jesus,

and joined the army over which floated the banner of the King of kings.

The long, sad summer after Minnie's death was merging into early autumn, and the birches and oak trees in the lovely pass were beginning to glow in golden and scarlet hues, when up the glen came the news that a field-preaching was to take place at a spot not very far from Benvourd House. The great out-of-door preachings were not so common in that neighbourhood as in many other parts of the Highlands; and partly from the novelty of the thing, partly from the fame of the preacher, the young, noble-hearted minister, William Burns, Nora desired strongly to go, and her uncle willingly agreed to accompany her.

Brightly shone the sun that day, and every blade of grass and remaining tuft of heather sparkled under its rays, as the party from Benvourd set off to the place of meeting. It was a good way off, but both Nora and her uncle were famous pedestrians, and fully enjoyed the walk on that quiet early Sabbath morn. The impression made on her heart by Minnie's early death had never worn completely off; the longing after higher and more satisfying joys than the world could give was still filling the girl's heart; the soil was soft, prepared, though she knew it not, by the



great Creator for the ready reception of the words which, by the lips of his faithful messenger, were to prove that day to many souls the savour of life.

As the party neared the place of meeting, Nora was surprised to see so many people coming in all directions over the moors, where the heather was already turning brown. Across half-reaped fields of golden corn, down the steep hill-sides, they came, all looking eager, though with the calm hush of the Sabbath day about them.

“Uncle, where does all that multitude of people come from?” said Nora, as she looked in amazement at the crowd, as they congregated at the river-side, waiting for the ferry-boat to cross and recross with the many passengers; for the gathering-place was on the opposite side of the river from Benvourd.

Her uncle smiled. “You may well ask that, Nora. The greater number of these people have come from places miles distant, and some must have walked for hours to get here so early. God grant that not mere curiosity has brought them, but a hunger for the bread of life.”

Just then the ferry-boat reached the bank of the river where they stood, and Mr. Macleod and his niece stepped into it, along with several others.

“You’re getting hard Sabbath work to-day, Sandy,”

said Mr. Macleod, addressing his old friend the ferryman.

“Ay, ay, sir,” was the ready reply, spoken in the Gaelic language; “but it’s blessed work too, for if half that we hear is true, it’s the Lord’s own message that will be given to-day, and na doot many o’ Satan’s captives will be set free. The ferry work is one o’ necessity and mercy, I’m thinking; and the Lord’ll no’ hold us guilty for doin’ that kind o’ work on his holy day. Not one penny o’ payment will old Sandy take for this work. Yon’s a grand sicht, sir.” And as he spoke he pointed to the hill-side, just above the spot where the meeting was to be held. Already it was crowded with people, and the sound of psalm-singing was wafted to the river:—

“O come, let us sing to the Lord:  
Come, let us every one  
A joyful noise make to the Rock  
Of our salvation.”

Young and old, rich and poor were grouped there, the grass and the heather their carpet, and the blue arched sky their roof, while a small mountain cascade, as it leaped from rock to rock over-canopied by the rowan trees, mingled its music with that of the slight breeze and the chorus of strong voices. The scarlet cloaks and white caps of some of the older women, and the checked shepherd’s plaids of

the men, all formed a picture that would not soon die out of memory's eye.

But now the preacher stood in their midst, and with a voice of power, and eyes that once seen were never to be forgotten, addressed the crowd.

We will not here write details of that wonderful service, the words of which burned into the very souls of some of the hearers, and by the power of the Holy Spirit changed the lives of many. The subject was the parable of the ten virgins. Five were wise, and five were foolish. Vividly were they described; powerfully the utter folly of those who had lamps, but had no oil in them, was depicted, as having a name to live, yet Satan-bound, Satan-deluded, Satan-possessed. Then the contrast was drawn—the peace and joy of the wise virgins, united to Jesus, and so, with well-filled, clearly-burning lamps, ready when he calls to go into the marriage feast with him.

No mere description can rightly convey the power of that sermon, for every word seemed freighted with the power of the Holy Ghost convicting and converting. Truly the arrows of the Lord pierced sharply that day into the hearts of his enemies, and chain-bound ones groaning under the fetters of the Evil One were freed, and left the meeting, like the Ethiopian of old, "going on their way rejoicing."

And what of Nora? Not even the uncle sitting beside her knew of the conflict in her heart; no spoken words told of the surrender of heart and life into her Saviour's keeping. Yet the Lord of glory knew of it. And when the long-waiting, patient Emmanuel entered into that young heart by the door which was flung open for his admittance, and took possession, a new song of praise rang through the courts of heaven, and angels, amid the many songs of joy which they sang that day over ransomed souls, did not leave out a special one for the young orphan girl who had passed from death unto life under the preaching of God's own Word at the field-meeting in the lonely Highland glen. And when Nora lay down to rest that night, there played on her lips a smile of God's own peace, and on her brow, it may be, the angel-host could see the shadow of a crown more beautiful far than any earthly one of gold and rubies. And when, ere many days elapsed, Ronald received a letter from his dearly-beloved sister, telling the glad news of her new-found peace in Jesus, his lips also gave praise to God for the answer to many prayers, both of those who were still on earth and of those who had passed within the veil, yet whose prayers had been laid upon the golden altar, to be answered when the great Answerer of prayer saw

fit. And as Ronald read her account of the words which had pierced her heart, and the description of the preacher of them, he wondered if it could be the same person who, in his Master's name, had enlisted him as a recruit in the army of the Lord of hosts, bound for the great crusade against Satan. In some things the description agreed, in others not; and as he never met on earth again the mysterious stranger, he never knew if indeed it was William Burns who had spoken to him beside the Wishing-Well.

## CHAPTER XI.

### HOME LIFE.

“ Every day and every hour,  
Every gift and every power,  
Consecrate to Him alone  
Who hath claimed you for His own.”



**M**ORE than two years have passed since the death of little Minnie Macleod. Life at Benvourd has gone quietly on. Little duties, little cares, and what some would call little pleasures, made up the daily routine of the lives of most of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood ; and yet both in nature and the souls of the inmates of the glen there was growth. Not very visible, perhaps, to an unobservant eye, still the young trees in the pass were reaching upwards, and, all unseen, their roots were striking deeper down, enabling them the better to bear unharmed the wild winter blasts that from time to time swept over them. The river also, though almost imperceptibly, was deepened, the large boulder

stones in its channel were getting more firmly fixed in their places than of yore. And in the souls of many of the dwellers there, the words of gospel truth, sown on the September day we have written of, at the field-meeting, were springing up, "first the blade, then the ear," one day to ripen into full corn.

And so it was in Nora's soul: from strength to strength she was going on, ripening gradually in the wisdom which cometh from above, expanding into a noble Christian character,—a comfort in her home, and amongst the poor proving a true counsellor and friend.

Snow was on the ground, and a keen, frosty wind was blowing, when one morning she came into the drawing-room at Benvourd, equipped for a walk, fur cuffs on her arms, fur around her neck, and a leather bag in her hand. Very pretty she looked as she peeped in. "Any messages, auntie?" she said. "I'm off to see old nurse and some of the poor bodies; and I'll look into the school on my way back, and see how the children are getting on with their work."

"All right, dear," was the reply; "only, do not get cold. And take Cherry with you for company."

"How bright and happy Nora looks," Mrs. Macleod remarked to her husband, as he entered the room shortly after the young girl had set off on her walk.

"Yes," he said; "and yet I had a letter this morning from Mrs. Ross, asking if I did not think it was a mistake to keep Nora moped up here all the winter, when she should be mixing in society and seeing something of the world. Of course an invitation to spend the winter with them follows; and, if you agree with me, I have resolved to let Nora choose for herself."

"Surely she does not look either dull or moped. But if she wishes a change she shall have it."

In the meantime Nora was tripping down the pass with a glad heart. Never, she thought, had she seen the whole country more beautiful than it looked that day: the snow-crowned hills glistening in the sunlight, and the leafless trees, now sprinkled with snow, glittering like diamonds as the merry little sunbeams played on them, and the river, swollen with the melting snow, rolling swiftly along, making music through the lonely pass. Moping, indeed! The firm step and bright, sparkling eye of the girl told the falsity of that supposition.

Warmly was she welcomed by old nurse. Not long had *she* been in discovering the change that had taken place in her darling's heart; and many a time now, as she stroked back the golden brown locks off the broad brow, she loved to think that a fairer



diadem than that of this world would one day rest there.

On the morning we write of, a more than usually hearty welcome greeted Nora. "Come in, come in, my lambkin; I'm wantin' sore to see ye. Look ye here; I've had news o' my puir misguided laddie. He's livin', Miss Nora, sore broke down, they write, in mind an' body, but ower prood to say a word to his auld grannie, wha loes him dearly yet, in spite o' a' his faults. How got I the news, you ask? Weel, ye see, it's this Duncan Finlay; ye'll mind o' him?—Jean Finlay's son, doon the glen. Weel, he's been in furrin pairts, a sailor lad; an' in the ship comin' hame, wha should he see but Johnny—my Johnny—workin' his passage hame (for it seems he's been i' the Indies, puir laddie); and when he saw Duncan, he made him promise he'd no tell ony o' his folk where he was, or what he was daein'. An' at first Duncan had kind o' agreed to that; but when they were nearin' England, Johnny fell sick, an' Duncan has been rale kind to him, got him intil lodgin's, an' tended him like a brither. But my puir laddie's gettin' nae better; an' noo Duncan feels he canna' keep silence ony langer, an' so he wrote to his mither to tell her a' this,—and oh, Miss Nora, he says, for a' Johnny appears hardened-like to his hame, he thinks his

heart turns fondly to his auld grannie still, for in his sleep he ca's for me, an' speaks about the auld hills an' the bonny pass, whiles fancyin' he's helpin' the gentry to fish i' the river, or gangin' wi' them as he's dune mony a time ower the muirs when they're shootin' the grouse; an' aince, missie, only think, Duncan writes"—and as she spoke, tears ran down the old woman's cheeks—"he thocht he was in the kirk, an' began singin' oot the words o' the psalm, 'The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.' 'Deed, Miss Nora, my heart's fair like to break, when I think o' my bairn lyin' in yon great city, among strangers noo; for Duncan has to leave to join his ship again. An' since it's the Lord's will, I canna get to him, I've been thinkin', if only you would write to Maister Ronald, he'd seek him oot and comfort him a bit. See, here's the address I've gotten frae Duncan."

Nora looked at it. "Oh yes, nurse," she said; "I'll write at once to Ronald; I know he and my cousin, Mr. Arbuthnot, often visit among the lodging-houses in London; and Ronald will be so pleased if he can help poor Johnny in any way. Keep up your spirits, nurse; perhaps the illness may be God's way of drawing poor Johnny to himself."

"Ay, ay," was the old woman's reply. "I'm trustin' in him, missie; the Good Shepherd goes into

the wilderness after his errin' sheep, an' sometimes, even against their will, carries them home to the fold in his ain lovin' arms. And ye'll write soon, missie, an' tell me whenever ye hear?"

"That I will," said Nora, rising; "but I must run off now, for I have one or two sick people to see down the glen, and auntie told me not to linger too long." And calling Cherry to come away from the cosy fire, she set off, having cheered up by her bright looks and loving words the heart of the old woman.

Through the pass she wound her way, now running a bit with Cherry, now pausing to look at the river as it danced along, or to note the little birds as they hopped about from spray to spray, picking at the bright berries that yet remained. Then turning out of the pass, she crossed the highroad, and entered a small cottage in a field, where dwelt a sick child, nigh unto death; but at the sight of the bright young face, she looked up with a smile. Nora produced some little delicacy out of the leather bag, to tempt the failing appetite; then seating herself beside the bed, began, at the child's request, to "sing to her something about heaven." In the rich, sweet voice with which God had endowed her, she sang of the land where hunger

and thirst, pain and sickness are felt no more, and where—

“ Christ’s presence fills each heart with joy,  
Tunes every mouth to sing.”

And the sweet singing soothed the restless child, and brought a smile of peace to her lips; and when, with a word of prayer, the visit ended, and Nora was out again on the snow-covered earth, the child lay and thought of her bright young visitor, and of the happy land of which she had sung.

One or two more visits of love, and then Nora turned into the village school, the face of the teacher lighting up as she entered. She had a kind, merry word for all, praised some and gently chid others; then sat right down among the workers, and told them a story over which eyes that were beginning to look weary sparkled again, and to which the teacher herself listened as eagerly as the little ones. Then followed a simple hymn about the “Happy Land,” in which the voices of even the very little ones chimed in sweetly.

And once again Nora was off, having left a good influence behind her. She had had a happy day, and an adventure as well; for just as she was leaving the pass, who should she meet but two young girls, nieces of their neighbour, Mrs. Forbes, who,

along with their governess, were going to Benvourd with an invitation for her to spend a week at Craiglora, to meet some friends from England who had arrived unexpectedly.

The girls had come so far in the carriage, and were to walk through the pass to Benvourd, but had contrived to take a wrong turn, and being strangers to that part of the country, were wandering about in great perplexity when they met Nora and her dog. "No doubt," said one of them, "if you had not met us, we would have been benighted, and, perhaps, perished in the snow!"

Nora had laughed at that idea, but made a good joke about the travellers who had lost their way in the Highland pass.

They did not return with her to Benvourd, as they had lost so much time, and were to await the carriage again at a house not far from the pass; so Nora returned as she had gone out—alone. She looked so bright and merry, as in her eager way she related the day's work, that her uncle and aunt smiled to each other as they thought of Mrs. Ross's idea that she was "moped" in her Highland home. All were much interested as she related that nurse had at last heard of her wandering grandson; and tears of sympathy filled Mrs. Macleod's eyes when she told

of the dying child who had asked her to sing about heaven, and her thoughts turned to her little daughter so early called to glory.

In the evening Mr. Macleod gave Nora Mrs. Ross's letter, and told her he and her aunt gave her full liberty to accept the invitation, if she felt at all inclined to do so. "We will miss our bright sunbeam," he said, "but only desire that in this matter you should please yourself."

Nora read the letter, laughing over the idea of her moping. "Why, uncle, what does she mean? I am as happy as I can possibly be; and I have so many things to interest me, and people to love, I could not manage to be dull." Then she said seriously, "Uncle, if I am to answer this invitation as I wish, I would really rather not go,—at the present, at all events. I know I would have many temptations there to which I am not exposed here; and although I believe Jesus would enable me to resist them, still,"—and she lowered her eyes as she spoke,—“I am only a beginner yet in the Christian life, and I am fearful I might not prove a loyal banner-bearer in that household. No, uncle; if you and auntie will keep me yet a bit, I would rather not go; though I do wish to go to Mrs. Forbes' if I may. I do so love the dear old lady; and the girls are so nice also. Dull, indeed! I only wish

Clara were one half as happy a girl as I am! Uncle, I do think people can't be *really* happy till they have learned to love Jesus. I am sure, when I think of what I was two years ago and what I am now, I can sing truly,—

‘ Oh happy day, that fixed my choice  
On thee, my Saviour and my God ! ’ ”

Her uncle drew her into his arms and kissed her tenderly. “ Thank God you can say that, Nora. I do believe your dear mother's prayers are answered for you, that you might be led to seek after the wisdom that is better far than gold and rubies.”

## CHAPTER XII.

### SOUGHT AND FOUND.

“ Ring the bells of heaven ! there is joy to-day,  
For the wanderer now is reconciled :  
Yes ! a soul is rescued from his sinful way,  
And is born anew—a ransomed child ! ”



OUR scene changes from the Highland glen to a large mercantile house in the city of London. It was three o'clock on a winter day, and the gas had already been lighted indoors and in the streets ; but work was going on busily yet. Clerks were running here and there giving orders to the many porters who stood awaiting them, while several still worked hard at the desks to which they had been chained for hours. The season was a busy one, and work-hours were longer than usual then ; but there was no look of discontent on the faces—visions of holiday-time and Christmas were rising before most and cheering them on. Besides, the heads of that firm had always a kindly word for their employes. Here and there, in



a pause of the busy work, the young men might be heard discussing their plans for the coming evening or the approaching Christmas week. "I'm off to the theatre to-night," said one, addressing a gentle-looking lad who sat beside him. "Will you come with me, Farran? There is a famous new actor to appear, and the play is a good one. There's no use asking Macintosh or any of his set, for they never go; they're a dull lot. But you're different. Besides, you've seen so little of the world, it will do you a deal of good. Say yes, and I'll manage about a ticket."

The lad thus addressed hardly seemed to hear the question put to him, for just then he was looking fixedly at a neighbouring desk, at which sat a handsome young man, with a look of quiet joy on his face that told of a heart at peace. Then he turned quickly, as if awakening out of a dream. "A dull lot, did you say, Perkins? then Macintosh does not belong to it. He is always so happy; you never see him sulking and disagreeable, like some of the other fellows. I was just looking at him now, and wondering how he contrives always to be so cheerful."

"Oh, well, I suppose he's happy enough. I bear him no ill-will, but I hate cant. Now, what about the theatre? Let us leave Macintosh alone; he can

go his way, we'll go ours. A short life and a merry, say I!"

Farran hesitated; he liked neither the tone of his companion's voice nor the words he spoke. Was it merely his own thoughts, or did whispered words really reach his ear,—“If sinners entice thee, consent thou not”? In any case, the effect was the same. A whitewashed house in a country village rose before his eyes; and there, with a bunch of pure white roses in her hand, stood his gentle, loving, widowed mother as he had seen her last, when she said farewell to him, and repeated the very words which now sounded in his ears: “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” He turned to his companion, and in a tone of decision said, “Thanks, Perkins, for your offer of a ticket to the theatre, but I would rather not go. I am not ashamed to confess that I know my doing so would grieve the most loving-hearted mother that ever a lad possessed; and so, although she never said to me not to go, still I believe she trusted me to respect her wishes in this matter, and I mean, God helping me, to do it. You know I am the only son of my mother, and she is a widow.”

Perkins's only answer was a low whistle of contempt, and any further conversation was stopped by the head of the firm, Mr. Arbuthnot, tapping young

Farran on the shoulder. "Look here," he said, "I have to go off in a hurry; take this letter to Macintosh, and tell him I forgot to give it to him when I was speaking to him just now. It came for him just after he had left the house this morning. See, he has left his desk and moved to the other end!"

Farran rose to fulfil Mr. Arbuthnot's order. Macintosh took the letter with thanks, then began to speak to Farran. "It seems strange," he said, "that we two, who spend our days in the same place, have never yet exchanged words. My cousin told me that you were, like myself, from the country,—a stranger in London. If your Saturdays are not always engaged, would you join me in a walk? It is pleasant on the Heath if the day be fine. Say, to-morrow?"

Farran gave a hearty response to the proposal, adding, "I often long for a breath of country air in this smoky town, but walking alone is stupid work."

And so a friendship, which we have not time to follow out, was struck up between these two; and Ronald was given once more the joy of lending a hand to hold up the faltering steps of a weak child of God, who had well-nigh slipped amidst the temptations of a crowded city and the attractions of thoughtless companions. Ere long Farran could write to his mother that he "believed that God had

given him Ronald Macintosh as a friend and companion in answer to her prayers." And who shall say that it was not even so?

Snow fell on the evening of the day we are writing of, and the children at many a window in the comfortable houses of luxury in the west of London watched with delight the merry snowflakes, as they called them, as they fell whirling about with every breath of air. All over the great city they fell, covering up the dirt in the crowded, dingy streets and courts, as well as whitening the large parks and gardens. Very fast they seemed to fall on the window-sill of a poor lodging-house, where a lad, sick unto death, tossed from side to side on his comfortless bed. Far from home and friends, he lay forsaken and desolate, reaping the bitter harvest of a wasted life, experiencing even now the truth of the Scripture words, that "the wages of sin is death;" "the way of transgressors is hard." Yes, he felt it now; and somehow it seemed to him as if the little snowflakes were repeating the words to him over and over again: "The way of transgressors is hard." No other words would come just then to his memory; but before his eyes floated a far-off vision of a lowly Highland hut, and an old woman, and of just such a snowy winter day, when he had stolen away from

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his happy home, enticed by wild companions, to escape the dull life, as they termed it, of the Highland glen, and try his fortune in the great city.

He had not meant then to leave his home and kind grandmother for ever. He had had visions of making a fortune, and returning to keep her in comfort in her old age. But the wrong step taken, he gradually fell, first into ways of idleness, and then into worse ways; had roamed about from land to land, weary and unsatisfied, till now he lay dying in a comfortless London lodging-house, his only friend obliged to leave him, while he had refused to let him tell his Scotch friends anything about him. So now, he said to himself, there was no help for it—he must die. Scripture words of hope, blessed invitations of love from God's own lips, were well known to him; his Scotch Bible education had left him no stranger to those words of psalms and paraphrases sung in the quiet country church on Sabbath days. They often rose to memory. But he refused to take the comfort; he said they were not for him. He could join the many in saying, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;" but as yet he stopped there.

And so on that winter evening he lay, before his eyes a picture of high mountains, on which the snowflakes were falling even then, and in his ears the

rush of the Highland river as it dashed through the pass, near which stood the home of his childhood. Oh, to see it once again!—to hear, but for one moment, the dearly-loved accents of the Gaelic tongue, to him sweeter and more melodious than any other language in the world,—to feel once again the loving hand of his grandmother laid on his brow, as she was wont to do in his boyish days when she gave him her good-night blessing! As he thought of these things, the tears fell fast, and an agony of bitter repentance filled his heart; and for the first time the words, spoken in what to those around him was an unknown language, broke from his lips, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

The landlord of the house, who had strolled in at that moment, heard the words, and turned hastily away. He said to himself, “I do wish some friend would turn up; that lad Finlay said he had written to his people in the north.”

But the words had struck on the ear of a young man who was just entering the room, after having asked “if a lad called John Robertson lodged there.” Quickly he strode to the bedside, and spoke a few words in the same strange language. They seemed to act like a charm on the sick lad. He raised himself in bed, a bright light sparkling in his eyes, and

said, but not in Gaelic, "Who are you, sir? and where do you come from? Oh, speak again in my native tongue, that I may make sure that it is not all a dream!"

Then ensued a conversation in Gaelic, which it is well I am not called upon to write, or my readers to peruse; but every word of the strange guttural language sounded as soothing music in the ear of the dying lad. Great was his surprise when he discovered that the handsome young gentleman beside him was the Master Macintosh with whom he had often climbed the hills and fished in the river near his northern home.

Not long had Ronald to tend the dying lad, for his days were numbered; but to him was given the joy of being used as God's instrument to set free one of Satan's fettered captives. To the cry for pardon, which were the first words that had greeted his ear, he could give, in all their fulness, the Lord's words of free forgiveness, could tell how Jesus "came to seek and to save them that were lost." And the heavy, sin-sick heart grasped with a firm grip the precious promise, "He that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." And so, even at the eleventh hour, Johnny Robertson fell at the feet of his mother's Saviour, and was able to say, "My Lord and my God!"

"Herein indeed is love, not that I loved God, but that he loved me." "Tell grannie," he said, "her and my mother's prayers are answered now, even to me, the chief of sinners. Sing to me, Master Macintosh, once more the psalm I used to sing wi' grannie, and at the kirk, with the high hills around—'The Lord's my shepherd.'" And when Ronald came to the words, "Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale, yet will I fear none ill: for thou art with me," a feeble voice broke in, in the lad's native tongue, "That's so, that's so." One deep-drawn breath, and the soul of the Highland laddie was with the Lord.

They buried him in an old London grave-yard, around which the hum of busy life was perpetually heard; far from home and kindred he lay, miles and miles away from the calm quiet of the grand old hills which overshadowed his childhood's home. A single stone, put up by Ronald, marked his resting-place, and on it were the words, "With the Lord."

There were tears shed in the quiet hut over the letter which told of the death of the wandering one; but they were not all bitter: joy mingled with the grief—the erring child was at rest now in the Father's house above. "The Lord is a promise-keeping God," said the old woman. "The Good Shepherd has gone into the wilderness after the lost




sheep, and borne it safely back to the fold. For ever blessed be his holy name. And may his blessing rest on the head of the young lad who sought him out, and soothed his lonely dying bed, by telling him of that hidden treasure which is better than gold and above rubies.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE COUSINS.

“From that day I knew him—  
Christ, my Priest and King,  
Father, Friend, Physician,—  
Can I cease to sing?  
Nay, until he call me  
From my work below,  
I will tell his praises  
Wheresoe'er I go.”

“ ALONE, mamma! must I go alone?” said Clara Ross in a low, discontented tone, as her mother told her the doctor's opinion that, after the long, weakening illness from which she was just recovering, a change of air was absolutely necessary, especially now, when the east winds, so trying to invalids in Edinburgh, were blowing.

“He recommends the Bridge of Allan,” she said; “and your father and I have arranged that you shall go next week. Not alone,” she replied, in answer to Clara's query; “Maria will go with you. It will certainly be a trial for your sisters to dispense with

her aid at this gay season of the year, for she certainly dresses their hair beautifully; but, of course, they must make the sacrifice when your health demands it, although, I fear, I will have to endure their reproaches when they hear of the arrangement. It is unfortunate that I cannot go with you myself; but, of course, it is my duty to accompany Laura and Jane to the public balls, and then the two dances in our house come on, so I have no choice. Poor Clara! how grieved you will be at missing all the spring gaiety! What! crying, child? Well, well, never mind; the doctor says you will soon be as strong as ever, and you'll enjoy the balls all the more next year."

Clara pushed aside fretfully the hand her mother laid on her brow. "It isn't that," she said. "I was tired of balls and visiting night after night long before this illness came on; but oh! I don't want to be sent away alone with only a servant. Couldn't Aunt Emmie chaperon the girls, and you come with me, mamma?"

But such a proposal by no means satisfied the worldly mother. "Now, Clara, you must be reasonable. You know the calls of duty must be attended to; a mother must look after the interests of her children. I am sorry to have to send you away at

all, more especially as your father has peculiar ideas about it; so don't let him see how unhappy you are." And so saying, Mrs. Ross moved away to superintend some household matter.

She was not an unkind or even careless mother. In her own way she loved and was proud of her children. But her one ambition for them was a comfortable settlement in life; the things seen and temporal filled her heart, and a life of worldliness was making her cold and selfish.

That night, when Clara had gone to bed, the subject of the visit to the Bridge of Allan was warmly discussed in the drawing-room, where Mr. and Mrs. Ross sat with their daughters. Mr. Ross spoke angrily. "On one thing I have made up my mind—the girl shall not go alone. If her own mother cannot leave home, and her sisters are too selfish to do so, I shall give up a month's business and go myself. You girls will have to do with fewer fine dresses, that's all; for I will have to pay a gentleman handsomely to act for me. But I will not have my little Clara neglected for all the dresses in the world; so when you fix on the lodgings, take a room for me also."

A look of consternation passed between mother and daughters, and in one breath they exclaimed,

“ But, papa—Mr. Ross—you forget we are to have two dances in the house next week, and you must not be absent—it is impossible. Think of your duty to your family, my dear,” added Mrs. Ross.

But the only answer vouchsafed was, “ Well, my dear, to tell the truth, I have doubted for long whether my countenancing a constant round of gaiety and frivolity was indeed my real duty to my family. And when I see the result of such a life, in rendering my daughters selfish and unkind, I doubt it still more. We have higher duties to fulfil than merely living to ourselves, and I pray God he may teach us all to see it ere it be too late.”

If a bombshell had fallen in the midst of the little company, it could not have caused greater fear and astonishment than did Mr. Ross's speech. Higher duties to fulfil than living a life of pleasure! Why, that was the way religious people like the Macleods talked; and surely papa was not turning one of their sort! Mrs. Ross was sorely put out, but not so much astonished as her daughters. Ever since the time, now four years ago, that Mr. Ross had accompanied Nora Macintosh to Benvour House, on the night of little Minnie's death, she had observed a difference in his way of speaking of religion, and also a growing dislike to the constant gaiety which went on in their

house. She had shut her eyes to the fact, and was glad that the girls never appeared to observe it. So now she felt she must act cautiously, and said abruptly she would think over the matter, and see what arrangement could be made. One thing was certain—Mr. Ross must on no account be obliged to leave his business.

The next morning found her at the breakfast-table with a radiant face. An idea had occurred to her, which, if agreed to, would please all parties. "Papa," she said, addressing her husband by the name he bore in the family circle, "I have been so troubled about dear Clara all night; and as there seems a difficulty about either myself or the girls leaving home at present, how would it do to ask Nora Macintosh, of whom Clara is so fond, to visit her at the Bridge of Allan, and so provide her with a pleasant companion?"

Mr. Ross's brow lightened—for indeed it would have been a loss to him to leave town just then—and he said eagerly, "That would be a capital plan. My mind would be at ease if Clara had such a pleasant, sensible friend with her as Nora Macintosh; and as she has been brought up not to please herself only, I doubt not, if she can be spared from her home duties, she will go. By all means write and ask her."

And so it fell out, after a few days' delay, that Nora

Macintosh found herself installed in comfortable lodgings at the Bridge of Allan, as companion-nurse to her cousin Clara. In complying with the request, she had to make a sacrifice of no small kind; for the same post had brought her an invitation from Lady Dudley to spend the ensuing month with her in her English home, as she had long desired to become acquainted with the sister of her little boy's favourite friend, and also with the child of the Elenora Macintosh of whom she had heard so much. Inclination said, "Go; this is just what you have long been desiring, and it would never do to refuse." Duty said, "Decline for the present; your cousin is ill, and longs for your society." It was a struggle, we must confess; but Nora had been too long a servant of the One who came to earth not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and who has left his disciples the command to deny themselves, to hesitate long. And so the English visit was put off for the present, and Nora went to cheer up her invalid cousin.

And a pleasant six weeks' visit she had, as she afterwards told her aunt. Spring buds were opening, and light spring breezes, and soft, though often flitting sunshine, brought joy to the bright young heart of the healthy girl, and returning vigour to Clara's still delicate frame. Never before had the

cousins so much enjoyed being together ; and much pleasant girlish talk was interchanged. But though Nora at first said little to her cousin as regarded the change she had experienced since they last met, Clara was not long in discovering the quiet light in Nora's eyes—the look of rest, so different from the unsatisfied one which at times she had worn in the days gone by. All testified to “a heart at peace with God.” And, moreover, Nora preached by her life ; the unselfish spirit, the kind, loving words, the deep reverence for God's Word and for his holy day, all told from what source the peace and joy came. And somehow—as Clara told her father in one of his hurried visits, to see how the two girls were getting on—although Nora never sermonized her, or brought forth her own opinions, still she was never ashamed to speak of the love of Jesus, and to claim him as her own friend.

As she spoke these words, Mr. Ross bent over her and said, “Thank God, we may all claim Jesus as our Friend, if we will take him as our Saviour. I've been long in finding it out ; but I have found it, my child, though at the eleventh hour. Seek you him, my child, while you are still young, and the same joy and peace which Nora has got will be yours also.”



Clara's tears fell fast as her father spoke, for, indeed, for months past she had been weary and dissatisfied with her profitless life, and a longing after higher things had filled her heart; but she had feared the opposition she would meet with from all her home relations, and so had stifled the Spirit of God, and tried to drown the voice of conscience in a ceaseless round of so-called pleasure. And now, to find that her own father had been feeling much as she had done, but, not content with convictions of sin, had found the rest and the peace she longed to possess. That night proved the turning-point in the life of Clara Ross; and as she and her cousin sat together, after Mr. Ross had returned home, the barrier of shyness between them on sacred things fell, and Clara learned for the first time the way in which Nora had been brought to decision in religious matters, and heard all about the field-meeting, and the servant of God whose words had set her free from Satan's chains.

Nature had spread her fairest, freshest mantle of tender green over hill and dale, ere the cousins left the Bridge of Allan. The last evening they spent together there, was one neither of them ever forgot, one that rose often in memory's eye when seas rolled between the friends. Long they lingered, gazing out

of the window on the fair scene before them. The sun was beginning to set when first they took their seats on the couch placed near the window. Light fleecy clouds, varied with crimson and purple glory, were floating about on the horizon, as if accompanying the sun to his resting-place; and after he had slowly sunk behind the hills, they glowed even more brilliantly with his beams, seeming now to be set in a background of molten gold, till the eye fell beneath the exceeding beauty of the sight. But gradually the tints paled, and at last changed into a soft gray, with only the faintest blush of rosy hue, paling and paling till the shades of evening crept over all, and a crescent moon cast its silvery beams on the scene.

Words exchanged that night were long remembered by the cousins; and as, ere they parted, their voices rose together in prayer to their Father in heaven, asking for grace to help in each time of need, in her heart Nora thanked God that he led her to the quiet resting-place, and gave to her the high honour of helping onward in the heavenly path a child of his who was groping till then in the darkness, seeking light, but finding none.

And Clara returned to her home, strong as of yore in body, to begin a new life of usefulness, to prove a


comfort to her father, and a light, however feeble, to all who were in the house. From her heart now she could thank God for the long weeks of trying illness through which she had passed, when, withdrawn from the gay world's influence, she had had time to be still and to hear his voice, and been enabled by his grace to exchange the tinsel of a frivolous life for the true riches which she had formerly despised, but which she now esteemed as far better than gold and above rubies.

Nora wrote to her brother Ronald that Clara Ross had now begun the warfare of life under the royal banner.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A FAMILY GATHERING.

“ We shall meet in the Eden above,  
In that beautiful land of the blest;  
All our trials and pains will be o'er  
When we enter that mansion of rest.”

OURTEEN years have passed since our first glimpse of Benvourd House and its inmates. The month of September has come round again, when once more we take a look there. The house is full of visitors—so full, that Mr. Macleod says there must surely be three beds in every room; but his wife denies that fact, though she confesses that every little garret room is filled, and she is not sure that every one has a full complement of pillows. But, in answer to that, all declare themselves well satisfied; and the scanty accommodation only brings forth merry remarks from the youngsters of the party.

Time has, indeed, brought changes in the circle since first we saw them. There are silver threads

not a few mingled with the dark hairs of both Mr. and Mrs. Macleod ; and even Charlie, who was only a toddling two-year-old child when we first heard of him, is a fine manly-looking stripling of more than sixteen years old, the very idol of the three little girls and twin-brothers, who look up to him with great respect as their big man-brother. Well may the Macleods look with thankfulness at their six healthy, happy children ; and if a tear dims their eyes as they think of the loved daughter so early taken to glory, it is but for a moment, for the child's short life had not been lived in vain, and the Lord had made her death a means of softening some hard hearts, and drawing the parents' affections more and more heavenward. "The Lord hath been mindful of us, and he will bless us," was the unspoken utterance of both the owners of Benvourd House, as they looked round the assembled group.

Ronald, Eric, and Nora were there, though in altered circumstances from the time we first saw them. Beside Ronald, now a partner in his cousin's mercantile house in London, stood his fair wife, the Clara Ross of earlier years. They have only been married a few months, and this is their first trip since then to the Highlands. A quiet, happy light shines in Clara's eyes ; and of her it can truly be said, she is

a helpmeet for her husband. Hand in hand they are fighting beneath the royal banner of the great King; hand in hand they are engaged in the noble crusade which so many, thank God, are now waging against the powers of darkness in the overcrowded London streets; and from amongst many poor ones there, who through their instrumentality have been rescued from destruction, there are those who call them blessed.

Husband and wife have strolled out together, leaving a group of merry youngsters behind them. Ronald was the first to speak. "How well Nora looks, does she not, even with the thoughts of tomorrow's ceremony and the sad parting from so many whom she dearly loves. She wears a look of calm heart-joy; and the more I see of him, the more I feel that Eustace Ashley is the very husband for her, though one would fain have kept her in our own country. Still, when we think of the greatness of the work she is called upon to share as a missionary's wife, we dare not murmur; and every day it is becoming plainer that China, with its teeming millions, is a mighty field for mission work. Yes, as uncle said to me this morning, 'We must give her up willingly to the Lord's work, for he loveth a cheerful giver.' And Eric, too, Clara, what a fine man he has

turned out—first-rate at business, I hear! Indeed, Ashley told me yesterday that he knows the head of the firm in China where Eric is, and that he speaks confidently of ere long taking him in as a junior partner. If it be so, we may say his fortune, as regards this world, is made. And he is a true Christian, quiet, but real. We little thought, when he first went to Edinburgh to your father's house, Clara, that it was to be there he would awake to a personal knowledge of Christ!"

"And was it so, Ronald?" said Clara, in a surprised tone.

"Yes, indeed; he has told me so himself. It was Pedro's firm belief that he was a Christian boy, because he shrank from spending the Lord's-day in the way many of you then did, that first led him to see that he took his religion only from the 'precepts of men,' but was a stranger to Jesus, as his Saviour and Friend; so, as he says, it was Pedro who all unconsciously led him to seek the Lord. But see—here comes Sir James Dudley with uncle; let us join them."

It was well for Ronald that whilst thus occupied in talking to his wife, he did not hear the conversation which Sir James Dudley was carrying on with Mr. Macleod, for, indeed, praise of his friend Ronald

was the chief theme of it: the lad's admiration of the counsellor of his boyhood was increasing with his years, and in his ardent way he loved to speak of the one to whom he felt he owed so much. "Why, Mr. Macleod," he said, "I don't believe you half know what a splendid fellow he is, nor how he is adored by all who serve with or under him. You see, there is a friend of my mother's whose only son is a clerk in the house, and you should hear how he speaks of Macintosh. Why, he says, but for him he might have been a dissipated man. He was just standing on the verge of ruin, when Ronald came to his aid, took him from the society of bad companions, and led him into the right path."

Mr. Macleod's eyes glowed with pleasure as he listened. God had indeed given to him and his wife a rich reward, in the way the three orphan children whom they had brought up had turned out; and their praises were sweet to his ear. And with growing pleasure he saw the influence for good that all three were exercising over his own children as they advanced in years.

In the meantime, Nora had contrived to get alone with her aunt on this the last day in her happy home, for the morrow was to be her bridal day, and also that of a long farewell to Scotland's shores; for



after a short visit in England, she and her husband, accompanied by Eric, were to set sail for China, the land in which her husband worked as a missionary and her brother as a merchant. Her heart was full as she thought of leaving so many dear ones, but yet new ties and a new love filled her heart; and it was no small addition to her happiness that she was going to help in the work of spreading the knowledge of Jesus in a heathen land. Many loving words of advice and encouragement did she receive that day from her mother-aunt,—words to be pondered over and acted on when seas rolled between them.

Evening had come, and the youngsters, under the leadership of Sir James Dudley and Pedro, started for a walk, when Ronald, Eric, and Nora, detaching themselves from the rest, set out together. Almost involuntarily, it seemed, they turned their steps in the direction of the Wishing-Well. The sun's parting beams were just striking there when they reached it, and a rich golden hue was glowing on all around, lighting up the brilliantly coloured leaves of the various trees that formed the background to the well. For a minute or two they paused beside it, each heart recalling vividly the last time they had all stood there together, on the eve of Ronald's departure for school in England.

Eric was the first to break the silence. "Who remembers," he said, "the day, many years ago, when we stood here, and each wished for something beside this well? I wonder if our wishes have been fulfilled."

For a moment there was no reply. Ronald remembered vividly how his wish had been to be a true Knight of the Cross, and bear the royal banner boldly into the enemy's country; and with that remembrance there arose the form of the mysterious stranger who had showed him the real meaning of his somewhat fanciful desire. And Nora, too, was recalling the wish of her heart, that she might obtain what her mother desired for her, that she might be above rubies.

Whilst she and Ronald hesitated, Eric spoke again,—"My wish has, I believe, been granted, though not in the way I expected. I have got riches, great riches—even the untold wealth of the saving knowledge of Christ Jesus, which is indeed 'better than gold.'"

"Yes," said Ronald, "Eric is right; I do believe that the Lord has indeed given unto us exceeding abundantly above what we desired. He has given to me the desire of my heart—to be a banner-bearer in his glorious army, and to help in some small degree


the weak and oppressed ones. And you also, Nora, can say that your wish has been fulfilled. Is it not so?"

And Nora bowed her head in grateful acknowledgment of the fact. She knew in her inmost heart that she too had long ago obtained that which is above rubies.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE BRIDAL DAY.

“ He traineth us,  
That we may shine for Him in this dark world,  
And bear His standard dauntlessly unfurled;  
That we may show  
His praise by lives that mirror back His love,—  
His witnesses on earth, as He is ours above.”



THE marriage day had come at last. The quiet ceremony was to take place in the drawing-room of Benvourd House. And Clara was putting the finishing touches to her sister-in-law's bridal dress, and arranging the simple white wreath, with just a small spray of orange-blossom in it, on her head, when a thought struck her. “Why, Nora,” she said, “what has become of the costly diadem of gold and rubies I used to envy you the possession of when we were girls? I don't believe you have ever once worn it.”

Nora smiled. “No, Clara, I never have; and now it is mine no longer.”

“Why not, dear? have you given it away? Of

course, you were entitled to do so, for it was your own. To whom have you given it?"

At that question the bride's eyes sparkled with a glad light, and she quietly answered, "To the Lord, Clara dear; right into his treasury it went some three or four months ago. Uncle and aunt and Ronald also knew and approved; indeed, they felt as if I could have done nothing else. I have given myself, you know, Clara, to the Lord for his service; and could I withhold the most precious earthly possession I had? No, dear; I was only too glad I had it to give; and Eustace felt the same. How could I hear of the spiritual destitution of the millions of souls in China without desiring to aid them, not only by my life, but also by my means? And so, when Ronald found a trustworthy jeweller, willing to give a full price for the diadem, I sold it, and the money has gone ere this to aid the funds of the Chinese mission."

Clara's eyes filled. "O Nora, I am glad it is so! And Eustace will feel as I do, if he be not blind, that it needs no diadem of gold and rubies to beautify the brow of his bride to-day. But a truce to more talking now. I believe Ronald is waiting impatiently to take you down."

One moment the cousins knelt together in silent

prayer, then quietly descended to the drawing-room.

The autumn sun was still brightly shining, when the carriage drove up, after the luncheon was over, to bear off the bride and bridegroom. There was a mixed feeling of joy and sorrow in the hearts of all, for Nora Ashley was bidding, it might be, a long adieu to the home of her childhood, every spot of which was endeared to her by loving associations. Only that morning she had gone alone to strew some of her bridal flowers on the graves of her mother and of her little cousin Minnie, well knowing that she might never again revisit the spot. And now, even as with tear-dimmed eyes she drove once again through the lovely pass, gorgeous in its autumn dress, she cast around her a look which seemed as if it would stereotype the scene for ever on her memory's eye, to arise clearly in distant lands. As she passed the hut where the old nurse had lived and died, she pointed it out to her husband; and as she did so, she seemed once more to feel the kind touch of the loving hand as it one day had pushed back her golden-brown hair, and to hear the voice which had said, "I'm wonderin', my lambie, what kind o' a crown will sit on that bonnie brow; whether it will be the crown o' a vain world's folly, or the ever-

lastin' one that your mother prayed so earnestly might rest there?" And Nora knew now which it was; and even in the midst of her bridal happiness, she could look forward with joy to the day when she would take the golden crown put on her head by the Saviour's own hand, and casting it at his feet, give to him all the glory for evermore.

Meantime, the party assembled at the door of Benvourd House to see the young couple drive off turned slowly indoors; only Mr. and Mrs. Macleod and Ronald lingered a few minutes, to catch sight of the carriage as it wound down the steep road below the pass.

"God's blessing go with them both," said Mr. Macleod. "Long shall we miss our Nora, Ronald; beautifully has she fulfilled her home duties. And now she goes forth to a foreign land to work for the Lord in a distant part of his vineyard. As I told Eustace Ashley, ere parting, he was a happy man to have secured her for a wife; for truly 'the heart of her husband may safely trust in her. Her price is above rubies.'"

"Yes," said Ronald, "it is even so. Our mother's dying prayer has been truly answered as regards Nora; she has obtained that wisdom of which it is written, 'The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it,

neither shall it be valued with pure gold,' for 'the price of it is above rubies.' It can be said of her with truth that 'she stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy,' and also that 'in her tongue is the law of kindness.' I believe she will exert an influence for good wherever she goes, and prove to be well fitted for the arduous duties of a missionary's wife. And well may we ask God to bless and keep both her and her husband, as they go forth to lift high in heathen lands the Royal Banner of the King of kings; and may both be as crowns of glory in the hand of the Lord, and as royal diadems on the head of our God!"

THE END.







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